

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY



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FOREWORD

The Christian faith, that is, the faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ and in the Church founded by him is not an achievement of human philosophy, but a gift from God granted to those who become like little children before him: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God. Amen I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a little child will not enter into it." (Mk. 10:14-15; see also Mt. 18:1-5)

"I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones." (Lk. 10:21; see also Mt. 11:25) "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5; see also Js. 4:6)

It is a gift from God, not something coming from human power, and when man receives it, it makes him *blessed*, that is, it enhances and fulfills him, it transforms his entire life:

"Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. Then Jesus answered and said, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heaven'." (Mt. 16:16-17) "He who believes in me has life everlasting." (Jn. 6:47) This transformation, however, does not happen without man's cooperation, for though man does not have the power to *transform himself* into a son of God, he does have the capacity, if he cooperates, to *be transformed* by God's grace into a son of God, so as to share in the divine nature, as St. Peter says (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4).

This human cooperation consists in the opening of the human intelligence to the light of divine revelation, the submission of the human will to God's commandments, and the surrendering of the human heart to the divine love. Man seeks God in his heart, but nothing can be loved unless it is known, so that the believer needs to turn his whole mind towards divine revelation, with childlike humility and a trusting heart: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Mt. 5:8).

When in the first centuries of Christianity the Gnostics were placing human knowledge (GNOSIS) above religious faith (PISTIS), and therefore human philosophy above divine revelation, some Christians reacted by repudiating philosophy and holding on to the faith alone (*credo quia absurdum*), with an anti-rational attitude which has spawned many heresies through the centuries, such as the *fideism* and *traditionalism* condemned by the Church in the 19th century, and is. conspicuous both in Islamic theology and in Lutheran Protestantism, with their negative vision of human reason and its powers.

Other Christians, however, such as St. Justin, St. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria took their stand on a *Christian gnosis* based on faith in divine revelation, as opposed to the pagan gnosis based on the darkness of the human mind without faith. This Christian gnosis would be the wisdom of human reason enlightened and uplifted by faith.

For a believer, the first thing is his faith, that “pearl of great price”, that “treasure hidden in a field” for which he must be ready to sell everything he has (cf. Mt. 13:44-46), and about which he cannot have the slightest doubt since it comes from God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, as the I Vatican Council stated in 1870. And in this sense we ought to follow St. Paul's indication: “See to it that no one deceives you by philosophy and vain deceit, according to human traditions, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). But in trying to understand and *live* what he has accepted by faith, the believer has no choice but to use his intelligence. This faith seeking understanding, as St. Augustine and St. Anselm described it, is called theology.

Reason does not cease to be reason by being enlightened by faith, and thus the early Christians, both in defending the reasonableness of the faith against pagan attacks, and in trying to penetrate into its mysteries and apply it to their daily lives, created a *philosophy*, that is, a body of concepts and insights — a treasury of wisdom — generated by the theological effort to understand the faith and make it a way of life: their living as Christians stimulated their thinking as Christians, and this thinking brought new light into their lives.

What happened to the early Christians is bound to happen to every sincere Christian of any time and place: he needs to have a philosophy, a way of thinking and living, a Christian philosophy, to act as a link between his faith and his life, and as a vehicle of communication, with all other men of any culture, religion or background, with whom he can establish a dialogue that can lead those men to his faith, as St. Thomas Aquinas showed in his *Summa contra gentiles*, in which he makes a philosophical exposition of the “preambles to the faith” and defends the faith against errors, that is, how the Christian faith answers, from a higher plane, the most far-reaching questions of human reason and even carries it beyond itself.

If the believer lacks this philosophy, in other words, if he is not well instructed in his faith by an intellectual grasp of it joined to a sincere and living piety, his reason very soon goes on its own, leaving the faith in the domain of feelings or meaningless traditions or customs. Thus religion is split from life, and the Christian no longer thinks or makes decisions in the light of Christian principles.

In a comparatively simple setting, such as a peaceful rural

community, this absence of Christian philosophy may not do much harm if the setting is Christian, because in that case there is always a remnant of wisdom. But we must admit that our 20th century world is anything but simple. The Christian finds himself now in a highly sophisticated but shallow environment, due to the universal spread of education. Half-baked ideas proliferate and multiply at a bewildering rate, due to the growing efficiency of the mass media, and the whole tempo of life is in constant acceleration. This situation, rather than instant remedies and shortcuts, requires a much more careful philosophical and theological training in the Christian. With piety alone, without doctrine, there is a great risk of being unable to cope with the pressure of false doctrines. Of course, it is clear that with philosophy alone the risk is even greater. The Christian must unify his life with the blend of piety and doctrine on the basis of a deep and childlike humility, whose chief expression should be the desire to learn:

"If you abide in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Qn. 8:31-32)

It would be difficult to put the need for this unity of life in the Christian better than the late Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer, Founder of Opus Dei, does in *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 10:

"A life of prayer and penance, together with an awareness of our divine filiation, transforms us into Christians whose piety is truly deep. We become little children at the feet of God. Piety is the virtue of children. And if the child is to take refuge in the arms of his father, he must be, and know that he is, small, needy...

"We are to be pious, then, as pious as children, but not ignorant. Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously — all of which means theology. Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians.

"Our desire to advance in theological knowledge, in sound, firm *Christian doctrine* is sparked, above all, by the will to know and love God. It likewise stems from the concern of a faithful soul to attain the deepest meaning of the world, seen as coming from the hands of God...

"If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26) and given him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to uncover the divine meaning embedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be attained only by dint of hard work... We can never be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at truth. And Christ has said, 'I am the truth' (Jn. 14:6).

"The Christian must have a hunger to know. Everything, from the most abstract knowledge to manual techniques, can and should

lead to God. For there is no human undertaking which cannot be sanctified, which cannot be an opportunity to sanctify ourselves and to cooperate with God in the sanctification of the people with whom we work.”

A century ago, on August 4, 1879, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* with this sub-title: “On the Restoration in Catholic Schools of Christian Philosophy According to the Mind of the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas”. Towards the close of his long pontificate, in 1903, this same Pontiff declared that he regarded that encyclical as his most important, since it laid the foundation for all his subsequent teaching on man, society, marriage, labor and the State.

In this encyclical, Leo XIII points out that reason is the guide of man, and

“... therefore, if the understanding go wrong in anything, the will easily follows. Hence it comes about that wicked opinions in the understanding, flow into human actions and make them bad. On the other hand, if the mind of man be healthy, and strongly grounded in solid and true principles, it will assuredly be the source of great blessings, both as regards the good of individuals and as regards the common weal.

“We do not, indeed, attribute to human philosophy such force and authority as to judge it sufficient for the utter shutting out and uprooting of all errors. When the Christian religion was first established by the wondrous light of faith shed abroad, ‘not in the persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:4), but in showing of the Spirit and power’, the whole world was restored to its primeval dignity. So also now, chiefly from the almighty power and help of God, we may hope that the darkness of error will be taken away from the minds of men, and that they will repent. But we must not despise or undervalue those natural helps which are given to man by the kindness and wisdom of God, Who strongly and sweetly orders all things; and it stands to reason that *a right use of philosophy is the greatest of these helps*. For God did not give the light of reason in vain to the soul of man, nor does the superadded light of Faith quench, or even lessen, the strength of the understanding. Its effect is far from this. It perfects the understanding, gives it new strength, and makes it fit for greater works. The very nature of the providence of God Himself, therefore, makes it needful for us to seek a safeguard in human knowledge when we strive to bring back the people to Faith and salvation.” (Italics added.)

Both extremes must be avoided: a fideism or traditionalism that spurns reason, and a rationalism that puts reason above faith. And since St. Thomas Aquinas is the Christian teacher who has best done justice to both faith (theology) and reason (philosophy), the Church has consistently regarded him as her universal doctor, down to the recent II Vatican Council (1962-65), which took the unprecedented step, for an ecumenical council of the Church, of mentioning him by name in this respect in two of its official *documents*: the *Decree* on Priestly Formation (*Optatam totius*, no. 16) and the Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum educationis*, no. 10). And in 1974, on the occasion of the 7th centenary of St. Thomas' death, Pope Paul VI officially ratified the Church's stand on this.

The present book aims to give an exposition of that “Christian

philosophy” so much needed by the Christian who wishes to let his faith guide and enrich his own life, and spread its light and warmth in this turbulent world:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the measure, but upon the lamp-stand, so as to give light to all in the house. Even so let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Mt. 5:14-16)

I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the late Etienne Gilson, a true disciple of St. Thomas Aquinas, for all his works in general, but in particular his enlightening elucidation of the meaning of “Christian philosophy” in *The Philosopher and Theology*.

May the present book be a fitting centennial commemoration of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* by providing a glimpse of that Christian wisdom that “our era needs”, in the words of the II Vatican Council (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 15), “more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser men are forthcoming.”

The Author Manila, Feast of Christ the King, 1979.



PART I AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY



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PART I

An Introduction to Theology

CHAPTER 1

Theological Training

a. The need for doctrinal formation: a consequence of our divine vocation

To start with, let us look at the reason for this book. A Christian has the obligation to study his faith. This is the vocation of the ordinary Christian: to live according to his faith and to spread it. We have to spread our faith by a divine vocation we have received from God through baptism, a divine vocation which consists in being consistent with our faith, by putting it into practice, but as ordinary Christians, without withdrawing from the ordinary things of life.

But we need to have a special formation or training to be able to spread the faith, because the faith comes “from hearing,” as St. Paul says (Rom. 10:17): it has to be explained; it must enter through the ear; people have to hear about it. And this formation is necessary not only to explain the faith well, but first and foremost for our own sanctification: the apostolate is the overflow of the interior life (cf. Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 961), in our effort to put into practice in our own life all the requirements of our faith. For both, therefore, personal sanctification and apostolate (apostolate is simply to spread the faith, to give the doctrine of the faith to others and encourage them to live it) we need a doctrinal-religious formation, i.e. a scientific religious training, a well-founded knowledge of our faith.

Following the teaching of Msgr. Escrivá, we can consider *five aspects* of Christian formation:

(i) First, *human formation*, because the supernatural grace which comes to us doesn't suppress our human nature: on the contrary, it improves and enhances it. This means that we have to take into account the human virtues, all the human powers we have to develop in order to *cooperate* with divine grace in this life.

(ii) In the second place (this is not an order of importance) we have what we might call *spiritual formation*: on top of the human virtues, we have to develop the supernatural virtues which God infuses into us at baptism: the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity; and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. We receive them from God, but they have to be developed as well. And since the basis of all Christian virtues is humility, we have to

practise it, to learn it. Then we have to use the means for spiritual progress: prayer, mortification, examination of conscience. And this spiritual formation cannot be separated from human formation: they are related. We try to supernaturalize what is human within us and bring it to perfection for the sake of higher things.

(iii) Since the “hinge” of the sanctification of the ordinary Christian is his daily work and duties, as Msgr. Escrivá used to say, we want to regard our work, whichever it may be as long as it is honest (because we all have to work), as our professional activity. And what does “professional” mean? That we undertake it as a *service* to society and, therefore, to God. And it has to be performed with a sense of responsibility and perfection, excellence and thoroughness. This requires a great deal of study and training: *professional formation*.

(iv) The fourth aspect is *apostolic formation*. We have to spread the faith with the proper approach, taking into account, for example, what Msgr. Escrivá used to say regarding the gift of tongues, which is that gift of the Holy Spirit which enables the Christian to get his message across in the right way, to make himself understood. It doesn't mean that we need to speak many languages, but that we know how to speak to everyone in the way he will understand. In order to communicate effectively, we have to adapt the way of putting things to the person who is listening: not only the manner of speaking but also the right approach to the person. This requires a constant apostolic improvement in the way we deal with people. And we need spiritual guidance on how to do our apostolate not only in dealing with individuals, but also with groups. We have to keep improving our apostolic ways of putting the faith across.

(v) And lastly, since no one can give what he doesn't have, in order to give the faith, the content of the faith in all its richness and fullness, we need to know it ourselves, to know it very well, i.e. scientifically. That's why we also need a *doctrinal-religious formation* or theological formation.

The present book includes a short introduction to theology, followed by another short introduction (though a little longer) to philosophy, as a necessary training for a better assimilation of theology. Then comes the course on Christian philosophy proper, beginning with Metaphysics, which in a way is the most simple thing to study but the most profound. Then follows Natural Theology, called “natural” (knowledge of God by reason alone) to distinguish it from the “supernatural” theology, fruit of the enlightenment of the faith, superior to reason alone. Then we have a section on the Metaphysics of Man, another on moral philosophy or Ethics, and finally a summary of the History of Philosophy, all as a preparation for the course on theology

(i.e. supernatural or Sacred Theology).

b. Reasons for this study

The following reasons can be given for this study. *First*, God has created us intelligent. We are human because we are intelligent. Through our intelligence we can do what animals cannot do, namely *to know and to love God*. Admittedly, our intelligence is not very powerful: there are many things we don't understand. It is indeed very limited. Nevertheless it has a very remarkable capacity to improve itself all the time: we have the *capacity to learn*, to study. When we study and learn, our intelligence develops. It's like our muscles: if we exercise them they grow stronger and bigger. This is what happens to our intelligence: if we use it by study and learning, we can understand more and more. If Divine Providence has endowed us with intelligence and with its capacity to develop, this means that we must use it. In other words, we cannot expect God to give us an illumination which will put all the knowledge we need directly into our mind without study and learning. To sit down and wait for God to illumine us would be very comfortable, but we are made in such a way that we have to learn; i.e., to use our intelligence by studying, by making a mental effort. *Ordinary* Christians are not supposed to be “charismatics” or people who acquire knowledge by divine illumination *without studying*. We usually learn things not by divine illumination but by study. This doesn't mean that God never gives illuminations. He may, but it is not the usual way, i.e., the way for ordinary Christians.

And the first thing we have to study is what divine revelation says, the content of our faith, all the truths of the Creed. It is not enough to know them by heart. Depending on our stage of development, we need to study more carefully the implications of revelation in relation to our own personal life and social life, so as to see how we have to form Christ in ourselves and in our surroundings. This requires study. Only by study can we know our faith better and notice its implications. All these efforts of drawing the consequences from our faith constitute the study of theology. Thereby we relate all our individual and social activities to the *last end* of our life, which is the glory of God: the ultimate reason why we are living.

The *second* reason for this study is that our professional training is always specialized. For example, the work of a housewife is a very definite professional occupation — a very direct service to society. It requires a great deal of knowledge like the work of a doctor or a lawyer. However, this professional formation is not enough to equip us in order to reach our *last end*, because it does not give us a

global knowledge of reality. Therefore, on top of our professional training — a good professional training — we also need to study our faith in a scientific way, to study theology; i.e., the knowledge of God as He has revealed Himself to us.

This theological knowledge is what gives us the overall view of things, so that we can know what is the ultimate purpose of life, the last end, and the means to reach it. This theological knowledge blends very well with the other professional, specialized knowledge. Both are necessary because if one has a good knowledge about God but a poor professional training, he will not know how to make *concrete* the demands of his last end. One has to use the means, but within his particular set of circumstances, within the circumstances of his everyday life and work. On the other hand, if one has a very good professional knowledge but a poor theological formation, he may seem to be running very well but “out of the way”, as St. Augustine says, wasting his energy and time.

The *third* reason for theological study is that each person needs a theological culture or knowledge at least in proportion to his other knowledge, if not more. It is the task of every Christian to show a harmony between human knowledge and faith: that there is no conflict whatsoever between any human knowledge or culture, and his faith. But in order to accomplish this, he must be very well versed in his faith, in proportion to his own degree of culture or formation. This is to Christianize the world: to show a perfect continuity between any authentic human culture or value, and the faith.

One feels uneasy when he practices a profession or an occupation where he sees no connection with his religion. What happens then? That person's religion is completely cut off from his ordinary life. No wonder then his religion seems to be “irrelevant”. Precisely in order to bridge the gap, we need to study theology in order to see the close connection between any human activity, any field of culture (from the loftiest to the most humble) and our faith.

This is what Msgr. Escrivá meant by “putting Christ at the top of all human activities”, so that Christ will crown all human activities: that people may see that any human activity they engage in, as long as it is honest, can and should be in harmony with the faith and blended with the faith. The faith is most relevant to all human activities, but to understand this relevance requires knowledge of our faith.

c. A special reason

In addition to the three reasons there is a very special one. Under the present circumstances of the Church which is going through

a very critical period there is a very *special* need for theological culture. There is a trend for *practical* atheism, which sometimes is not only practical; i.e., living as if God did not exist, ignoring God altogether, but fully conscious and *theoretical*: people who are openly Godless, and they say so.

How did we come to this situation? Among other reasons, through lack of sufficient theological formation. Very often the so-called atheists are people who have not studied their faith seriously. *Religious ignorance* is rampant, and particularly damaging among educated people who are gradually becoming the majority.

Another reason is the growing *materialism* in the way people live and think. They may not be philosophical materialists, although there *is* a philosophy gradually engulfing the world which is the most thorough-going materialism: Marxist communism. But outside Marxist communism, there are people who are also materialist in life and practice: they take material values as the supreme values in life, such as wealth, strength, comfort and health. There is nothing wrong with physical fitness, body-building, health-care and the procurement of material comfort. What is wrong is to put these things at the top of all values. Msgr. Escrivá once spoke about *Christian materialism* in a famous homily at the campus of the University of Navarre in 1967 (cf. *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*). According to him, Christian materialism is opposed to all those materialisms which are blind to the spirit. Christian materialism is not blind to the spirit: it is simply the acknowledgment of the goodness of material things as created by God. But they are for the sake of something higher, for the sake of the spirit.

Another observation is the almost complete *neglect of humanistic studies* among students. There is a general attitude of materialism regarding studies as *useful* in order to make money, to acquire *material* well-being, as if this were the highest horizon of man. It is obvious that the study of humanities, such as history, geography, literature, classical languages, philosophy and so forth, doesn't generate much income. Hence, students prefer to turn to the sciences geared to technology and business which are more lucrative.

Humanistic studies are directly geared to man (that's why they are called "humanistic"), while technological studies are more geared to material things (the plight of the so-called social sciences is that they have fallen between two stools: they are neither humanistic, for they treat man as an animal or a thing, nor strictly scientific, for they lack accuracy). Thus, the general swing towards the technological and business sciences thickens the already materialistic environment of blindness to the spirit, while in humanistic studies seriously conducted (not in the pattern of the "social sciences", but on the basis of a

realistic metaphysics) we get an opening towards God, because we study things which are more specifically human, not just material.

In the last four or five centuries a culture has grown and developed outside the guidance of the Church. Before the Protestant revolt of the 16th century, the Church was the mother and teacher of all nations, of all sciences in the expanding European world. Under the protection and inspiration of the Church, all fields of learning grew. But the Protestant revolt ushered the movement of separation from the Church, and thereby of secularization of Christianity, which makes it first man-centered or purely humanitarian, and finally irrelevant and defunct. If one takes away the supernatural element of Christianity, it will not survive. It's only a corpse, and a corpse disintegrates very fast when the soul is taken away from it.

This man-centered culture now pervades the whole world, and everyone is exposed to its influence. What makes matters worse, it is unlike the pagan philosophies before Christianity. The pagans had more hope. It was like someone who was born blind and did not know: a groping for light without knowing what light is. There is natural goodness in such philosophies. One can see in them all the nobility they have in spite of their shortcomings. But this other culture which has developed since the Protestant revolt bears the stamp of rebellion against the Church, and therefore against Christianity. It is post-Christian, rather than pre-Christian. This makes it by and large deeply hostile to Christianity.

As a result, Christians today are breathing this air which penetrates the soul almost imperceptibly. It is like *osmosis*, that phenomenon whereby what is more dense has an influence on what is less dense. If the pressure from the outside is more than the pressure we can muster from within, we will be influenced by sheer osmosis.

And to top it all, not a few Catholics are affected by an inferiority complex in relation to that post-Christian culture. But there is no inferiority complex whatsoever in one who is well versed in theology. Then we realize the vast difference between the wisdom of Christianity and any other wisdom. But in order to appreciate it, we must study it.

d. Content of theological study

Taking into account that theology is the science of our faith, the first thing to study therefore is the body of truths which have been revealed concerning God, man and the world.

When the Church, which is the recipient of divine revelation or divine mysteries revealed by God, strives to *understand* the content of these mysteries and express them with actual concepts, this

expression of a divine mystery is called *dogma*.

For example, in the beginning everybody in the Church received the revelation of Jesus Christ. But who is Jesus Christ? The Church then, looking at Jesus Christ with faith, comes to this conclusion: He is the Divine Word, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, both God and Man, one divine Person, two natures joined together in one Person, one of them divine and the other human ... In this way, the mystery of Christ is expressed in actual words and concepts. This is what the Church has been doing throughout her history. And the study of these dogmas is called *dogmatic theology*: a pivotal part of theology and a vast study (twenty centuries of life, thought and study on the part of the Church). This is where the Church is infallible: making sure that these dogmas really and truly express the mysteries revealed by God. The Church cannot teach error concerning God, because she has received this gift of infallibility from Christ himself. This gift is vested on the Apostles who received the power of teaching (cf. Mt. 28:18-20), with St. Peter as the head of the Apostles (cf. Mt. 16:18-19). Therefore, in the study of theology, the first thing we have to do is to follow the teaching authority of the Church (*Magisterium*).

After dogmatic theology, we have *moral theology*. After the Creed comes the Code: in the light of dogmatic theology, there are certain *rules* of behavior we have to live by. *Morality is that quality of human acts whereby they agree or disagree with the last end of man*. In order to have a clear guide to live by, we also have to study theology, or the content of our faith, in relation to our personal and social behavior, and this is *moral theology*, a vast study as well. It includes among others, the study of the last end of man, the motivations of man, the sources of the morality of his acts, the commandments he has to follow, the virtues he has to practice, the vices he has to avoid, the means he has to use in accordance with his faith.

Thirdly, since the Church is also a human society, like all societies it needs not only a morality, but a *law*. Morality or *natural law* is inner in the mind, as we shall see. But there is also a *positive law* which affects the *external* behavior in society. This law is passed by the authority, applied by the authority, and enforced by the authority, and no society can function without it. The Church, therefore, also needs laws to regulate the external behavior of Christians within the Church: this is what is called *Canon Law*. "Canons" are the actual legal prescriptions which the Church has passed, approved and coded, and it is the reflection of the supernatural reality of the Church. So, it cannot be studied without taking into account moral and dogmatic theology. For example, in marriage there is a *dogmatic* aspect: the

study of marriage as God has revealed it; and there is a *moral* aspect: how married people should live according to that revelation; and the *legal* aspect, the cannon law aspect: what the Church expects to be done externally by married people.

Another is the Cult: as a consequence of our faith we worship God. We give Him cult and worship because our faith teaches us our complete dependence on God. It teaches us, therefore, to be thankful to God, to adore Him, to seek forgiveness from Him, and to ask Him to supply our needs. This is expressed also externally through the body and through community action: this is the *liturgy* or worship or cult. And this again has to be studied in the light of dogmatic theology. It is our faith that will teach us the way to worship God. It is our faith that will teach the Church, and the Church will implement the way to worship God.

Finally, since the Church develops in time, we have to study its *history*: how the Church has actually lived. It is a very useful study because it illustrates the truths of the faith: the errors, the heresies, the Church definitions due to the historical circumstances, how liturgy has been practiced, the development of religious living within the Church, the government of the Church, the impact of the Church on the culture and development of society.

There are other parts, like archeology, classical languages, oriental languages and other auxiliary sciences. But these are the main parts of theology: *dogma*, *morals*, *canon law*, *liturgy* and *history*. Much of this knowledge is acquired by the ordinary Christian in the catechism, although in an elementary fashion. What we do in theology is to study these matters in greater depth.

Throughout the history of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a body of knowledge has been accumulating. It is called generally Catholic Theological Doctrine: an elaboration of the simple truths of the faith.

CHAPTER 2

Theology As A Science

a. The object of theology

Let us take a look at theology as a science. Understanding by science *a knowledge with accuracy and with certainty* (knowing the real *why* of things), we can distinguish between the *object* of a science and the *principles* of a science. The object is what we might call the subject-matter, what the science is about: about man, or animals, or energy, or languages, etc. And the principles of the science are the starting-point: some directly observable or self-evident data. We then elaborate on the latter by means of demonstration or proof, verification and further data-gathering. We put all those things together, and thus the *object* of the science is constructed from the *principles*.

The word *theology* means the study of God: *Theos* means God, and *logos* means study. We can approach God as a *natural* object of study, or we can approach God (and this is the only possible way for us Christians) *in the light of our faith*; i.e., not only as a *natural* object known by natural reason alone, but by divine revelation through supernatural faith. The object of *supernatural* theology is God, but more specifically God as He has revealed Himself to us in His intimate life in Christianity, namely God as One and Triune, as One God and Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their intimate life. Our natural reason alone cannot discover the Blessed Trinity: revelation is needed.

This divine revelation, however, is not only about God Himself and the Three Persons, but also about the *works* of God, which are basically two. First, the *creation* of the world. According to divine revelation, God has not only created the world, but He has created it in a certain order whereby the less perfect beings are subordinated to the higher ones. Man is at the top of the order in the material universe: the world as the creation of God, and man as the peak of His material creation. And secondly, man has not only been created by God, but *elevated* through grace: raised by grace to a manner of life greater and higher than that which he could live by his natural power. God has given man a supernatural end.

After man's loss of that original supernatural endowment, God works the *redemption* of man: the salvation of man beginning with the *incarnation* of the Son of God, followed by His perfect *sacrifice* of atonement, His triumph over death and the foundation of His *Church*. And, the Church is entrusted with the task of implementing the work of redemption by applying the merits of Christ to individual persons by means of the Christ-given *sacraments*. This is in broad outline the content or object of theology.

We must bear in mind, however, as will be explained further

on, that in all the facts or truths revealed by God, there are some which are *strictly supernatural*. Man, for instance, cannot discover by his natural reason alone the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. But other truths also revealed by God which are *natural* truths *can* be discovered by human reason alone, such as that God exists and that He is one, and that there is a moral law. Divine revelation, which includes both the object and the principles of theology, contains both natural truths and supernatural truths.

b. Source of theological knowledge: divine revelation

Where is this revelation contained? It is important for us to know exactly where this revelation is contained, because therein we have the *principles* of theological science, i.e. its starting point. Of course, those sources of revelation are accessible only to our faith. Without faith we could not approach those principles, and theology is dead.

Where then are those sources of revelation? God has revealed Himself to man, entrusting the teaching of this revelation to the Church founded by Christ. This revelation has been gradual, as man was not in a position to take it all at once. There was a divine pedagogy throughout centuries of gradual revelation to the patriarchs of the Old Testament, the Mosaic Law, the Judges and Kings, and the Prophets. The climax of this revelation is in God's own Son, the very Word of God who became flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is the fullness of revelation, the final word — the Word —, after which, therefore, nothing can be added.

And to whom has this Word been entrusted? To the Church. Jesus Christ, the Word of God and Son of God, spoke of His Church (cf. Mt. 16:18) and founded it upon the twelve Apostles headed by Peter. Divine revelation is therefore contained in what was handed to the Church: the Word of Christ. This Word has been transmitted by the Church, both in speech and in writing. Revelation is thus contained in two sources: the written Word, i.e. Holy Scripture or the Bible, and the unwritten Word, which is called Sacred Tradition. But both Scripture and Tradition make up a single, inseparable source, transmitted and interpreted infallibly by the Church, because the Holy Spirit has been given to the Church for this purpose according to the Word of Christ (cf. Jn. 16:12-15 and Acts 1:8), so that this divine revelation — the Divine Word — will be kept in its entirety, to be faithfully transmitted through the teaching authority of the Church.

These therefore are the *principles* of theology as a science. In the science of physics, for example, the principles are the data

supplied by observation of material things, and so physics depends on them for its existence as a science. In theology, the principles are contained in the Divine Word, which is therefore the *rule* of theology: we have to go to the Divine Word accepted *on faith*, believing it fully.

But who guarantees that this is the real Word of God? The Church. That's why the *proximate* rule of faith — and thus of theology — is the teaching authority of the Church, and the *ultimate* rule is Scripture and Tradition. If we approach the Bible or Tradition ignoring the Church, we may be misled. What we do is to consult the Church, the teaching authority of the Church: What has the Church said on this? We listen to the Church, and we realize then that when the Church teaches she always teaches with the Bible on one hand and Tradition on the other. She is a *living teacher*, while the Bible alone or Tradition alone are dead things. They are alive only in the Church. The theologian as a scientist, then, has to study and teach always in agreement with the teaching authority (Magisterium) of the Church, which is the power of the Church to teach the truths of revelation infallibly.

The entire revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit speaking first through spokesmen of God, then through the Son of God Himself, and thenceforward in the Church. It is not for the Church to *increase* the deposit of revelation. The Church doesn't invent anything, or increase or decrease anything. The mission of the Church is to accept the deposit of revelation and to pass it on *in a living way* to generation after generation, to all peoples of all times, without adding or subtracting anything.

What then is the task of theology? Not to add to, or subtract from revelation, but to help us to understand better what we believe, so that we can live it better.

The supernatural truths are accepted by man through the faith he has by trusting in the authority of God who reveals them. "Faith" has two very closely connected meanings. One is the *act* of belief: not what I believe. I believe in Christ, for example; thus, Christ is my faith, but also my believing in Christ is my faith. We can call the act of believing *subjective* faith, and the object of belief *objective* faith. Divine revelation therefore is objective faith contained in Scripture and Tradition and handed on by the Church, while the act of believing whereby I accept this is my subjective faith.

This act of faith is an act of understanding, prompted by an act of the will which accepts the witness of God as true because there is nothing more believable than what God says. This act of the will, however, is prompted by divine grace. That's why both the act of faith and the virtue of faith are *supernatural*. Faith is a gift from God (see Foreword). When I believe, I understand, but this is not an act of

understanding something on the evidence of it, because the truth in this case is not evident, as when I see the table in front of me. If I say, "Jesus is the Son of God" and believe it, it's not something I can see directly. Why do I believe it? Because I trust in Him, I *want* to trust in Him: an act of my will makes me believe. But this act of the will is *entirely free*, because there is no compulsion to believe.

This is why the *prompting of grace* is required. God's grace moves the will to move the mind, to accept what is proposed as a matter of belief. The act of faith is therefore a *supernatural* act, and the virtue of faith is also *supernatural*.

As for the content of the faith, the objective faith, the truth we believe in, it is the principle, the foundation, and the rule of theology. Theology doesn't try to prove the truths of the faith, because it takes the faith, the revelation, as the starting point. What theology does is to deepen the understanding of this revelation, so that we can live it better.

Specifically, it tries to reach a deeper understanding of the articles of the faith with the help of comparisons, similarities with natural truths, with other things we already know. Let us look, for example, at the reality of our *divine filiation*. How does theology approach this matter? It looks at the data. Where? In revelation. What does revelation say about our divine filiation, about the fact that we are children of God? Look at that sentence at the beginning of St. John's Gospel, that all those who believe in him were not born of flesh, of the will of man, but of God: those who believe become children of God. How can we understand this? Theology, then, may try to compare that divine filiation to human filiation, trying to better understand this reality by means of that analogy with human filiation.

Another way in which theology studies the faith is, as the I Vatican Council teaches, by noticing the connection of the divine mysteries with one another, like that between the Blessed Trinity and our Redemption: how the Blessed Trinity gets involved in our life, and how this takes place in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This is the work of theology: the study of the connection of the mysteries, relating them to one another and to the *last end of man*. What is the end of man? Happiness in the union with God forever. Thus we see that the Blessed Trinity, Redemption, the Holy Eucharist are related to one another and to the last end of man, to the happiness of man, to Glory, to the Beatific Vision.

However, the I Vatican Council also states that all these truths studied by theology are always studied through the darkness of faith: we do not enjoy a direct vision of these mysteries. That's why even when they are studied by theology they remain *wrapped up in obscurity*. These are truths which we can understand, but never

completely they are understandable (otherwise they would not be a "revelation") but incomprehensible. That's what a mystery is: not something which doesn't mean anything, but something that means so much that we can never understand it completely.

As theology needs faith, the study of theology therefore requires *a right disposition of the soul*: a disposition of humility and obedience, and a profound piety. One cannot study theology as one would study physics or chemistry. It must be studied with a deep disposition of *humility*, because we are approaching God, who infinitely surpasses us; *obedience*, because God is the supreme truth (there is nothing more truthful than what He says); and a profound *piety*, an attitude of prayer and adoration, asking for enlightenment from God, because our mind is obviously limited and we are confronted with an infinite object.

Theology, therefore, is studied in order to get closer to God, to be able to strive for sanctity with better knowledge, and to help other persons to find their way to God (apostolate).

c. The believer uses reason in theology

The starting point is then the faith, i.e. the revelation received through faith. But in order to elaborate the science of theology, we have to use our reason: our capacity to think, to put things together in our mind, draw conclusions, gather data, organize them, draw further conclusions, etc. Therefore, our means of knowing in theology is *reason illumined by faith*. While in order to study physics, for example, we use only reason, in theology we use reason illumined by faith. But when reason is illumined by faith, it doesn't thereby cease to be reason. We don't change our manner of thinking, our *logic*, when we are enlightened by faith, anymore than our nature changes when it is sanctified by grace (grace does not suppress nature but brings it to perfection). Faith doesn't contradict reason, though it surpasses it. By faith, we are not asked to accept something we do not understand at all, like a square circle or a finite infinity. Revelation is called "revelation" precisely because it *reveals*: it enlightens or illumines us.

There is no conflict, therefore, between faith and reason. When studying theology we should always remember two things: first, that we are not using reason alone, but also, that we are using reason all the time. What faith does is to protect reason, to prevent it from falling into error regarding divine things. But reason remains reason. We are not asked to accept things without understanding them, even if they are enveloped in mystery, in obscurity. We do understand them, and they are relevant and applicable to our life. With reason alone man can reach a certain amount of natural truths concerning God, the moral order and the immortality of the human soul. These are *natural* truths and it is possible for reason to reach them by itself. However, by the enlightenment of faith, reason is raised to a higher vantage point from which it can see more things and more clearly.

In the Christian, these two orders of knowledge — supernatural truths and natural truths — are joined but without confusion. We distinguish them very clearly, but we don't separate them. They *could* be separated: a man could lose his faith while retaining his reason; that's why they are distinct. But for reason to lose the faith once it has received it (apostasy) is the worst thing that can happen to it.

In the face of divine truths, reason suffers a natural darkness, as well as an *infranatural* darkness. It is important to notice this in order to appreciate the need for humility in approaching matters of divine faith. Reason is subject to a natural darkness due to the simple fact that it is limited, while divine truths are infinite. But there is also an *infranatural* darkness, i.e. a darkness *below* our nature. This is the darkness due to original sin, to *fallen* nature. In the state of *original*

justice, our first parents had the natural mastery of their passions by reason and will — gift of integrity—; but after original sin, man just cannot control himself: reason and will are unable to control the passions. This leaves reason in a state of infranatural darkness, which makes it all the more imperative for man to approach this matter with the greatest humility.

By receiving the light of faith, reason is healed, raised, and empowered to understand things not understandable otherwise. Both the natural and the infranatural darkness of reason are to a certain extent dispelled by the light of faith. Faith is to reason, what grace is to nature, what supernatural truths are to natural truths. Faith doesn't substitute itself for reason, but brings it to perfection (which means that it is good for us to study what reason can discover by itself alone). Likewise, our nature is not replaced by grace, but healed, raised and empowered. Grace comes to the intelligence as light, to the will as power, to the heart as love. It inflames our heart with love, empowers and straightens our will, and enlightens our intelligence, all at once, but without destroying those faculties. It is like the fire making the iron red-hot, while remaining iron. It's iron, but on fire. This is the work of grace. And this is what faith does to reason.

Revelation, as contained in Scripture and Tradition, and explained by the Church, adapts itself to our limited way of knowing so that we can understand it. And our reason is by nature geared to the truth. If it were impossible for us to reach the truth, we could not be raised to know divine truths. That's how a sound philosophy comes to our aid: to show that we can indeed attain the truth. Admittedly, we cannot attain the *whole* truth about everything, because then we would be God; but we can know things in their truth, really and truly, however imperfectly and incompletely. This is the basis for the study of theology. One may wonder how we can understand anything about God if our mind is limited and God is infinite. It is true that we cannot take the whole thing at one glance, but we can always take a little more, so to speak, because we *are* capable of attaining the truth, and in this our mind is indeed imperfect but *perfectible*.

As we have said, the truths of faith are above reason, but not against it, otherwise they would not be a “revelation” to us. It is also true that man has the power to reject the faith by using his reason in the wrong way. This means that the acceptance of revelation is free on the part of man. Faith is both supernatural and free. There is no imposition on the part of God. God doesn't treat man as a puppet, but as an intelligent being, so that man accepts the faith freely, prompted by grace, but freely.

Nevertheless, when the Christian faith has been received and accepted, we can say like St. Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of

the Living God”, with the greatest possible *firmness*. And this firmness in our believing is stronger than the firmness with which we accept natural truths with reason alone. That two plus two is four, we accept as a natural truth with our reason, with complete certainty and firmness, without any doubt. However, the firmness of our certainty in this case is less than the firmness of our acceptance of the Word of God based on His own authority.

This means that if we accept any doubt in matters of faith we gravely offend God, because doubt is the opposite of certainty. Faith must be accepted with absolute certainty, with a certainty even stronger than purely rational certainty. The starting point of theology is faith *firmly accepted*: as St. Paul calls it, “the obedience to faith” (Rom. 1:5 and 16:26).

As a result of this firmness in the acceptance of faith, the believer has a certain feeling of superiority with regard to the practical problems of life. In the light of our faith, we can be much more sure and certain of what is true and right than in the light of any other authority or school of thought (cf. Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 582). There is nothing more certain than the Word of God. And this is not pride or triumphalism, because we have the humility of knowing that we can indeed make many mistakes with *our* reason, while God, on the other hand, cannot make any mistake. Therefore, putting all our confidence in His Word is an act of humility, and it gives the Christian that feeling of superiority to assess and approach the things of this life. This is what my faith tells me, therefore it is much more certain than what anybody else may say with his reason alone, infinitely more certain and trustworthy.

More specifically, the believer uses reason in theology for three purposes:

(i) To demonstrate what are called *preambles* to faith. These are the natural truths leading to the acceptance of the faith: existence of God, human freedom, immortality of human soul, natural law, etc. Thus, reason is useful to theology in this respect by showing the reasonableness of all the preambles to faith (how far reason can reach by itself), and then showing that faith comes to enhance reason and to confirm those truths of the natural order clarifying them.

(ii) To deepen and widen our understanding of the *supernatural* truths by means of analogies, similarities and comparisons as was mentioned with the example of our divine filiation.

(iii) To reject the attacks against the faith. If somebody attacks the faith, reason is used to prove that whatever is said against the faith must be mistaken, either because there is misinformation about the facts, or because the arguments are incorrect. For example, if

someone says that Mary is not the Mother of God but only of the “humanity” of Jesus, we may reply simply that this is wrong because it contradicts *our faith*, it contradicts what the Church says. But we may also, as theologians, reply that it is wrong, not only because it contradicts our faith, but also because the arguments are incorrect: if this person believes that Jesus is the Redeemer of man, His sacrifice must be the sacrifice of a Man who is also God, since otherwise this sacrifice cannot have an infinite value (for *all* men); therefore, the Person of Christ must be only one, and Mary is the Mother of the Person; so, she must be the Mother of God. With *reason*, then, we have proved that his argument contradicts itself, because on the one hand he believes in the divinity of Christ, and on the other he denies that He is the Redeemer of man. This is also the role of reason: to expose the *unreasonableness* of the errors against the faith.

Lastly, reason can also unmask certain theories or arguments which although not in direct opposition to the faith, might implicitly be so.

All the above shows why we should study what reason can achieve by itself, i.e., *philosophy*, which is the knowledge of the first principles of reality in the light of reason. Philosophy ought to be studied because it is the instrument of theology.

CHAPTER 3

The Philosophical Exercise of Reason as Instrument of Theology

a. *Spontaneous knowledge and philosophical knowledge*

We have considered theology as a science, and how in the content of revelation there are *natural* truths (those which we can know also by reason alone) and *supernatural* truths, which are revealed to us and could never be discovered by ourselves. All these together make up “divine revelation”, which therefore contains not only supernatural truths, but natural truths also, which God reveals so that man will know them better, with more clarity, with more certainty.

We have also examined the relationship of faith and reason. Faith is an act of the *understanding* moved by the *will*, which is moved also by the *grace* of God. It is an act of understanding, and therefore not separated from reason. Those mysteries we believe in *can* be understood; otherwise they would not *reveal* anything to us, although they cannot be *fully* understood or comprehended due to their divine depth. All these things have been defined by the Church (so that they are now part of *dogma*) in the I Vatican Council of 1869-70

Philosophy is the natural and spontaneous use of reason in trying to understand reality in itself. And what is the difference between “common sense” and philosophy?

What we usually call common sense is the ordinary knowledge which everybody has by using his reason spontaneously in an *unreflective* or *pre-scientific* way. *Science* goes beyond common sense, not by contradicting it, since our intelligence is naturally geared to the truth of things, but by reflecting on our knowledge and discovering *why* it is so, i.e. by looking for the true causes or explanations of what we know. Philosophy is science, but of a unique type, since other sciences are always concerned with only *one aspect* of reality (they are particularized in their object), while philosophy looks at *reality as such*: it tries to understand the *ultimate* meaning of reality, of being, of existence, of life, seeking the ultimate explanations, the *ultimate causes* or first principles of reality.

We have therefore three levels of knowledge natural to man: (i) common sense; (ii) science; (iii) philosophy. The three of them are within the reach of anybody as they are characteristic of human intelligence, and they are *natural*, as distinct from faith, which is

supernatural.

Faith is nevertheless also knowledge, although it is directly *given* to man by God; that's why it is supernatural, while the other three are natural in the sense that man can *acquire* them through his own natural powers of sensibility and intelligence in contact with reality.

Theology is, as we have seen, the use of reason enlightened by faith in trying to understand better what we believe. Now, since the content of our faith includes God, the ultimate happiness of man and ultimate meaning of the world, theology is also concerned with finding the ultimate explanations or causes of all reality. This is what philosophy and theology have in common, that they are both *wisdom*.

By "wisdom" we understand the *highest* type of knowledge man can aspire to: the knowledge of all things by their ultimate causes. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is impossible for man to acquire wisdom, since this requires a divine mind. This total knowledge of everything is not possible for a finite mind. But what is possible for man is to *pursue* wisdom, to try to know ever more and better and more deeply. We do this on two levels: on the natural level through philosophy, which is precisely the *love of wisdom*. That's what "philosophy" means: "philo" means in Greek "friend of", and "sophia" means wisdom. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, which is always open-ended, since we can always increase it in depth, in extension, in scope, in range...

But God, in His mercy and goodness, has decided to communicate directly to man a *participation* of His wisdom: only a participation or share, since we do not have an infinite mind. Just as He has created us, and thus has made us participate *in being*, He also wants us to participate in His wisdom, in His knowledge. And thus, He reveals to us what He knows: this is the divine revelation which we accept by faith.

Therefore, when we accept this divine revelation we are in possession of a wisdom far superior to philosophy, which is only natural wisdom. But we still use our reason in deepening our understanding of divine revelation. And so, although this knowledge by faith is higher than the knowledge we can acquire through reason alone, it doesn't replace it, it is in continuity with reason. Reason is lifted up by faith, as we said, and that's exactly what theology does with philosophy. Philosophy is the product of reason alone; theology is the product of reason enlightened by faith.

Theology heals, lifts up and empowers philosophy. This philosophy enlightened by theology (reason enlightened by faith) is able to see those ultimate explanations about reality in a very much clearer light: the light of faith. But this means also that theology uses philosophy. Just as faith is *given* to reason, reason must be used in

accepting the faith. We said that faith is supernatural and free: free, because we are not compelled to believe. But it is also *reasonable*, because it fits in very well with reason; it is *fitting to reason*: otherwise it would not be a “revelation” to us, it would not reveal anything to us.

b. Continuity of all knowledge

Let's go back to those three levels of natural knowledge. If we start from the bottom, we have the spontaneous *common sense* knowledge. And then, if we follow up the thrust of our mind and try to understand the *why* of what we have always accepted by common sense, we step into science and philosophy: knowledge of things by their causes (science in general) or by their ultimate causes (philosophy).

Common sense and science are like two stages of development, like the difference between a five-year old child and the same child ten years later: he knows more, he has more experience and maturity, but he is still the same person. Likewise, it is not the task of science or philosophy to “prove common sense wrong”, but to bring it to perfection by providing the *reasons*, the explanations, the causes, the *why's*, for the certainties of common sense, which should be accepted at face-value for they *are* that reality we try to understand.

Now, part of the knowledge of common sense is the truth concerning God and man, though in a very simple way. How does someone come to the understanding of the existence of God? The moment a child reaches the age of reason, he already has the idea that God exists in a spontaneous way without any process of reasoning. In many cases this is aided by a religious formation at home, for example. But even without this type of exposure, he gets the idea of Someone higher than himself, who is the Lord of everything. The human mind awakens by its contact with reality, and when it realizes that things *exist*, that they are there, and that they are all limited, very naturally thinks of a Creator. Who has made *all this*? Someone very powerful, an infinite Being. And at the same time, man gets the idea that this infinite Being has the power to reward or to punish him for being good or bad. Thus, the idea of the moral law, as related to God, also strikes the mind from the beginning, and hence the sense of guilt. And still another thing: that somehow we will live forever (immortality of the human soul). The discovery of death is a shock to children, as it does not occur to them that life can come to an end: life is more real to them than death.

God, the natural law (moral law), the immortality of the human soul: these are realities attained by common sense. But common

sense is not a knowledge that can prove or demonstrate. That is the next stage: science or philosophy. But science and philosophy deal with the *same reality* as common sense.

The rectitude, the uprightness of this spontaneous knowledge of common sense depends on the moral dispositions of the person: in the last analysis, on his freedom and response to grace. That is why it's very important to educate the conscience of children from the beginning, and let them go to sacramental confession when they come to the age of reason: to clarify these matters in their mind and heart gives them a great peace and joy.

As for the effort of philosophical knowledge, it must be in continuity with the upright use of common sense. In the case of the believer, i.e. the person who has received the gift of faith in baptism, this continuity is enormously helped and guaranteed by the faith, which prevents reason from falling into error concerning matters of God and the salvation of man.

But when philosophy is alone, on the other hand, instead of following the line of common sense, it may sometimes pervert it. In fact, ever since the time philosophy broke away from theology in the 17th century with the advent of Cartesian rationalism, many philosophers have tried their best and use every possible resource of intelligence to pervert common sense, to contradict the spontaneous knowledge of things, and thus to undermine the faith, because faith is in continuity with reason, and so is common sense, philosophy and theology. If philosophy breaks this continuity, a gap is created between common sense and faith which cannot be bridged. That's why it's so important for us to be guided by our faith, to make sure that philosophy, the use of reason alone, will not turn away from common sense and from the truth. Faith is like the guide, the beacon-light for reason not to lose its way in religious and moral matters.

Faith uses reason, but reason depends on faith: reason is guided by faith. Philosophy has been called the "handmaid of theology" (*ancilla theologiae*). A handmaid is someone who helps. Theology needs philosophy, but this doesn't mean that philosophy is above theology: it is at the service of theology. This is the honor of reason: to be at the service of the higher knowledge given by God to man directly (revelation), which is, of course, superior to any knowledge man can acquire by himself. Supernatural wisdom is infinitely greater than natural wisdom. And it is the honor of natural wisdom to serve supernatural wisdom. This is how faith and reason are related, as explained by the I Vatican Council.

c. Historical origin of Theology: Christian Philosophy

The Protestant revolt of the 16th century was a break from the authority of the Church. Cartesian philosophy, a century later, was a break of reason from the authority of the faith. And so, much of modern philosophy has grown ever since in opposition to the faith, and it is sometimes deeply anti-Christian. But what happened at the very beginning of Christianity?

When the Apostles began to preach the faith, to what kind of people did they preach it? What was the philosophy of those people? If we take the Epistles of St. Paul, for example, we will find that they contain an explanation of the Christian faith, but we can also see that he assumes many things which his listeners already know. Thus, he talks of certain concepts, like justice, happiness or humility. People knew those concepts, but he was using them in a new context. In order to explain the faith to those people, the very first Christian teachers (the Fathers of the Church, as they are called) accepted much of the current philosophy, since many of its insights were quite valid and acceptable: about the moral law, God and the immortality of the human soul.

The purpose of the Fathers of the Church was to explain the faith better. Their motivation came entirely from the faith: they were not “philosophers” or interested in philosophy as such, but rather in the salvation of souls, that people should know the Gospel, the good news of God, and thus find their way to salvation. But in order to achieve this, naturally they had to use some sort of language and concepts which anybody could understand: they used natural philosophy. So, with the help of their faith, these Fathers created a philosophical instrument in harmony with the faith: an entire philosophy grew up under the auspices, so to speak, of the Christian faith.

Under this protection of the Christian faith, a new philosophy emerged made up of many elements taken from the philosophy which was already there, but incorporating new concepts in trying to explain the “new things” of Christian revelation, as our Lord says in the Gospel (cf. Mt. 9:17): when you have new wine, it's better to use new wineskins. A whole body of philosophical knowledge was thus created, and this is what is called *Christian philosophy*, a philosophy related to Christian revelation, to the Christian mysteries revealed to the Church, but none the less a *philosophy*: in trying to understand and explain these mysteries, theology uses arguments from reason, which, therefore, are not only theological but philosophical. However, they are like instruments of theology. Theology then will grow out of the blending of this philosophical knowledge with the data of revelation. This is what happened at the beginning.

From the 4th century onwards we have the *ecumenical*

councils (general gatherings of all the bishops of the Church headed by the Pope). The first of them took place at Nicaea (near Constantinople) in the year 325. From then on there have been up to 21 ecumenical councils, the last of which was the II Vatican of 1962-65. The purpose of these gatherings was precisely to elaborate Christian doctrine in response to certain needs of the time, and issue practical rules and directives for the moral life, divine worship and the reception of the sacraments.

In the elaboration of doctrine, the task of these councils, with the assistance of Fathers of the Church, later called Doctors of the Church and theologians in general, was to serve the Church in understanding the content of revelation, finally endorsing their findings with the authority of the Church. This is how theology has been serving the Church for centuries.

This means, therefore, that the teaching authority of the Church (Magisterium), given to the Apostles headed by Peter (succeeded by Bishops and Pope), has used philosophical terms and concepts in the dogmatic formulations. When the teaching authority of the Church states a revealed truth to be believed by the faithful, this is done by means of dogmas or dogmatic formulas. And only the infallibility of the Church makes these formulations *dogmatic*, i.e. part of the teaching of the Church, in other words, part of the faith. These dogmas are not mere theological elaborations, but truths of the faith, contained either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture and Tradition (a “theological elaboration” is a *conclusion* from the faith, not the faith itself or truth of faith). But those dogmas contain philosophical terms and concepts. Therefore, in order to study theology we must study philosophy, because it is the instrument of theology: before we go into theology, which is the scientific study of our faith, we need to acquire its philosophical basis.

Thus, after this brief introduction to theology, we shall go on to philosophy. And we shall study it bearing in mind all the time that this study of philosophy is *for the sake of theology*: for the sake of our faith, of our sanctification and apostolate. Our approach to philosophical truths must be to see how they blend or harmonize with our faith. “No philosopher” says St. Thomas Aquinas (*In Symbolum Apostolorum*) “before the coming of Christ, was able with all his efforts to learn about God and what is necessary for salvation, as much as a little old woman knows by faith, after the coming of Christ.”



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PART II

Introduction to Christian Philosophy

CHAPTER 4

Development of Philosophy in Christianity

a. Beginning of Theology in Christianity

Our topic is the growth and development of philosophy within Christianity, the historical elaboration of this philosophy: how it grew under the protection of the faith from the beginning of Christianity.

Theology developed in the first centuries of Christianity to reject errors and heresies specifically, and make the dogmas more precise. Heresies arise out of human pride, but lack of clear definitions can give an occasion for them. Take for example the divinity of Christ. St. Peter made that confession of faith, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mt. 16:16), but from the very beginning this was misunderstood by some who thought that "Son of God" meant that Jesus was an extraordinary *creature* whom God had anointed and chosen, but he was not God. They could not put together the divinity of Christ and His humanity, because the dogma to a certain extent had not been defined about the two natures, divine and human, subsisting in one Person who is divine: it was thus defined only at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Before that definition, the Church knew that Christ was both God and Man, but it was not clearly formulated. This is what stimulated the growth of theology.

Theology used the philosophy already existing, the classical philosophy, but correcting it in the light of the faith. Having purified it from its errors, it was fully acceptable in everything else. Nevertheless, practically in every truth of philosophy, divine revelation had a very original contribution to make, always casting new light. For example, what was the idea of this classical philosophy about God? Great thinkers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had indeed reached a very lofty conception of God; but the revelation God made of Himself far surpasses the most sublime conceptions of those philosophers. The same thing applies to creation, man, freedom, immortality, sin, the moral law, and all other natural truths concerning God and man: divine revelation always goes well beyond what mere human philosophy can discover. Of this, the early Christians were quite conscious. They did realize that divine revelation was indeed from God, not from themselves.

At the same time, however, those early Christians had to communicate with their contemporaries and with their philosophy, so as to attract them to the truth revealed by God. There were even some

philosophical concepts current at that time which divine revelation took up and perfected with a new and original meaning. Take, for example, the concept of “word” (*logos* in Greek; *verbum* in Latin) used at the beginning of St. John's Gospel. What did philosophers mean by this concept? A mind or thought behind the world, making and ordering all things: this world has to be made by someone, and this requires a design, a pattern, and hence a mind. It was a rather nebulous idea, not always understood in the same sense, because for some this “word” was immanent to the world, like a world-soul, while for others it was outside this world. But Christianity told them: This thing you are groping for is the Word of God, the Thought of God Himself that has actually become a Man.

Thus, the early Christians brought the best achievements of pagan philosophy to their perfection, without feeling that they had to learn from it since *they* had received divine Wisdom itself in Christ. However, in order to communicate this divine Wisdom they had to use language and concepts familiar to their hearers. And this apostolic need gave rise to the elaboration of a “Christian philosophy”, which was *Christian* on two counts: (i) in its *origin*: the apostolic need to communicate; and (ii) in its *purpose*: to explain Christian revelation with enough precision to avoid errors.

But it is not specifically Christian in its *content*, since it overlaps with the human or natural philosophy which was already there, even though it perfects it and enhances it sometimes beyond recognition. It is therefore *real* philosophy, understandable by every man of any culture or time. The adjective “Christian” is extrinsic to it, just as when we talk of Greek philosophy or German philosophy: philosophy as such has no qualifications, just as mathematics or chemistry.

Christian philosophy is therefore a body of natural truths which are strictly philosophical, but would not have come into being without Christianity. Christian *theology*, on the other hand is the *elaboration of divine revelation by reason and faith*, using philosophy therefore. For instance, the concept of *person* is philosophical, but theology uses this concept in order to believe more deeply in the mystery of the Trinity and in the mystery of Christ. The Bible speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, although it never states explicitly that there are three Persons in one God. This is how the Church explains it theologically: using concepts which are philosophical (“person” and “nature”). The concepts of person and nature are philosophical, and hence understandable by any man; but the depth of meaning that Christian philosophy puts into them is due to the Christian revelation, which has prompted Christians to deepen these concepts so as to explain the faith better. However, once truths such as the Blessed Trinity are *defined by the Church as of faith*, they are no longer mere

theological elaborations but *revealed* truths guaranteed by the infallibility of the Church, as was explained earlier.

b. The original synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas

The process of formation of this Christian philosophy lasted for several centuries of historical fluctuations. Persecutions, migrations, invasions and wars had an influence on this process, but an unprecedented synthesis of Christian philosophy and theology was achieved by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. It is the Church herself that has declared this ever since and almost every Pope and every ecumenical council have done so. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is acknowledged as the universal teacher of the Church (*Doctor communis*), because he achieved the highest synthesis of faith and reason, and thus was able to explain the faith best.

But what happened up to his time? How had Christian dogma developed through the teaching authority of the Church, i.e. through the Popes and the ecumenical councils? In fact, it is noteworthy that St. Thomas died on his way to one of those ecumenical councils: the Second of Lyons. What happened up to then? Let us take a look at some of the landmarks.

The first three centuries are those of persecutions and martyrs, and thereby astonishing expansion of the faith to all the regions around the Mediterranean. At the beginning of the 4th century, the emperor Constantine put an end to the persecutions, and shortly afterwards, in the year 325, facilitated the summoning of the first ecumenical council at Nicaea, near the imperial capital of Constantinople (the really first general council had taken place at Jerusalem at the time of the Apostles: cf. Acts 15). This council tackled a heresy which was threatening to split the Church into two: *Arianism*, called after Arius, a bishop who maintained that Jesus was only a man, although so perfect that God had made him his Son, and thus he had become our leader or model, but he was not to be identified with God.

The Council of Nicaea *defined*, against Arius, that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, but “of one substance with the Father” (*consubstantialis Patri*). Thus was the divinity of Christ first *defined* by the Church. In the first three centuries there had been heresies, but the Church never had the chance of meeting in council because of the persecutions. There was, therefore, a great deal of groping for concepts and schools of thought, and even some good Christians fell into errors for lack of clear definitions of doctrine (the difference between “error” and “heresy” is that the latter is incurred

when the person who has fallen into error refuses to correct it).

After the Council of Nicaea and the Arian crisis, which took a long time to solve, there was a great flourishing of Fathers of the Church up to the end of the 6th century in both the Greek and the Latin speaking areas of the Roman Empire, coinciding with the first six ecumenical councils (the second was that of Constantinople in 381, which brought the Arian crisis to an end). These Fathers were men of outstanding holiness and solid doctrine, because there was already a good basis of definitions of doctrine.

There were outstanding Fathers among both the Greeks and the Latins, and they developed two different traditions in theology with the common ground of the faith. The Greeks were more inclined to dogmatic theology and the Latins to moral theology, but each complemented the other well. Among the Greeks we can mention St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. John Chrysostom, and among the Latins St. Ambrose, St. Hilary, St. Jerome and the greatest of them all: St. Augustine. The last of the Fathers is usually considered to be St. John of Damascus, who lived in the 8th century. Those who played their role since then are called Doctors of the Church. It is also generally accepted that St. Augustine was the greatest of the Fathers. He died in the year 430, which means that between him and St. Thomas Aquinas more centuries elapsed (eight) than between St. Thomas and ourselves (seven).

A very important thing happened between St. Augustine and St. Thomas: the Barbarian Invasions of Europe. They started at the beginning of the 5th century, and lasted, in successive waves, up the 9th century. When St. Augustine died, as bishop of Hippo in North Africa, his Episcopal city was being besieged by one of those barbarian invaders: the Vandals. Since their main purpose was plundering, every fresh invasion meant another devastation of culture and civilization, and the subsequent laborious effort of reconstruction. The Church converted and civilized them one after another.

The 7th century saw the rise of Islam and the subsequent Moslem invasions which were hostile to Christianity, unlike the barbarian invasions. After a defensive period, the Christian world replied with the Crusades, from the 11th to the 13th century: an effort to recover the Holy Land from the Moslems, once Christendom had been consolidated in Europe. The Crusades were largely a failure for the Christians, although many positive things were achieved. This is one of the reasons which moved the Christians to look West instead of East, and pushed them to discover a new continent; but the 13th century was perhaps the climax of what we may call the Christian centuries, and it is the century of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In the previous century, under the leadership of an outstanding

holy Doctor of the Church, St. Anselm of Canterbury, a new educational and cultural movement began which is what we could call the scientific inauguration of theology: *Scholasticism*. The Scholastics or Schoolmen, heirs to the monastic and cathedral schools which had preserved European culture throughout the Barbarian invasions, developed a very refined technique of study and teaching of theology in a systematic way. This was helped also by the fact that peacetime had given better chances for education to develop. Throughout the 13th century, the Church founded numerous universities all over Europe, beginning with that of Paris.

St. Thomas taught in several universities, especially in Paris, but also in Cologne and Naples. He achieved a great synthesis of all the knowledge of his time, taking advantage of the Latin translations of all the works of Aristotle which had just found their way into Europe via the intermingling of Christian and Muslim cultures in Spain. It was there that Christians translated in the 12th and early 13th centuries the works of Aristotle from the Arabic, into which they had been translated from the Greek by Syrians converted to Islam in the 7th century. St. Thomas was anxious to cull this culture (Greek, Jewish, Arabic) for the benefit of theology, following the principle that reason is at the service of faith, philosophy at the service of theology. This St. Thomas did like no one else had done before: to gather the very best of human wisdom in the service of the faith, thus enhancing it and purifying it from all errors in the light of the faith. The final result was a perfect harmony of reason and faith, this natural order and the supernatural order, philosophy and revelation and the teaching authority of the Church.

c. Continuity of Christian Philosophy

Even before St. Thomas there was already a trend to separate faith (revelation) from reason (philosophy), especially under the influence of Arab philosophers. After his death, this tendency was intensified with the nominalist and voluntarist philosophies of the 14th and 15th centuries. The crisis came in the 16th with the Protestant Revolt: Luther said that human nature has been *totally* corrupted by original sin, and therefore human reason is incapable of reaching the truth and has to rely on blind faith. This apparent exaltation of faith leads in fact to its downfall since, as we have said, philosophy is the handmaid of theology: theology *needs* philosophy as a helper. The Protestant rejection of philosophy and reason and human nature removes the ground wherein the faith is supposed to take root and blossom forth.

This tendency obtains a philosophical formulation, although

now with reason rejecting faith, with Rene Descartes. This philosopher, who lived in the first half of the 17th century, formulated a philosophy of pure reason without faith. While Luther had said “only faith”, Descartes said “only reason”, but in both cases there is a separation of faith from reason to the detriment of both. Faith without reason eventually develops into *fideism*: a heresy also condemned by the Church in the 19th century. On the other hand, Descartes provides the starting point for another heresy condemned by the Church in the 19th century: *rationalism*, or the rejection of everything “supernatural” (i.e. above *human* nature or *human* reason).

From the 16th century onwards, Western thought has consequently developed largely along those lines, with many immanentistic philosophies (see [ch. 21, j](#), and [47, b](#)) giving rise to heresies when applied to the Christian faith. All modern heresies have been occasioned by those philosophies spawned by the separation of faith and reason. This illustrates that reason needs faith all the time. Reason easily goes astray when it rejects the guidance of the faith, but, on the other hand, faith comes to enlighten *reason*, not just irrational or sub-rational feelings.

Now, parallel to those philosophies and those heresies, there has been a development of Christian philosophy. The teaching authority of the Church has pointed out that its peak was reached with St. Thomas, but this does not mean that this philosophy is a *closed system*. It is intrinsically open, because *it looks at reality*, not at the *human consciousness* of reality. And since reality is immense, this philosophy is always open to further insights, as long as it remains faithful to its principles: its congenital and methodical realism. In fact, not a few aspects of philosophy have been developed after St. Thomas following his mind, for example, in political philosophy, which has developed in the 19th century especially through the celebrated encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII. He and subsequent Popes have been able to develop a Christian philosophy on man and the State, human rights, social justice and so forth, in the light of revelation, going well beyond St. Thomas, although following his principles. This is due to the new situations to which they have been exposed, such as the modern totalitarian State and the accelerated growth in communications.

One thing, however, happened in the process: that some of the basic insights of St. Thomas, especially in metaphysics, which is the most nuclear part of philosophy, got lost. A good number of so-called Thomists have not been totally and completely faithful to the master. That is why Pope Leo XIII, in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which deals precisely with the philosophy of St. Thomas, also advocated a complete restoration of the study of St. Thomas in *his*

original sources, rather than in the commentaries and writings on him. The idea was to recover the real St. Thomas as a way of counteracting the many errors due to having neglected him. It was then Leo XIII who, in 1879, started this new period in the history of the Church: the restoration of St. Thomas Aquinas. The proliferation of doctrinal errors in the 20th century indicates that this restoration is still only in the process of being achieved, and has encountered enormous opposition, not only outside but inside the Catholic world. In the course of our discussion we shall have many occasions to verify the reasons for this opposition, and to cast some light on the problem.

PART IV

Natural Theology

CHAPTER 21

God Is

a. Man can know God: natural and supernatural knowledge

Natural theology is the summit of metaphysics. As we have seen, the real objective, the real goal which metaphysics pursues ultimately is God, the knowledge of God. The *object* of metaphysics is “being”, but through the study of being, it reaches the *cause* of being, the *principle* of being, the first cause and last end, and this is God. The crowning achievement of metaphysics is the knowledge of God to the extent that it is possible to man in the natural light of reason.

Now, the first point considered by natural theology is the existence of God: man can know God. How? First, he can know God by the power of his reason alone, both in a pre-scientific way (by spontaneous common sense) and in a scientific or metaphysical way. What is the difference between the spontaneous use of reason and the scientific use of reason? By the former, we simply know things, but the scientific use of reason consists in knowing the *causes* of things, as we saw in [ch. 6](#). In other words, while spontaneous knowledge simply knows, scientific knowledge knows *why*.

We can know God both using reason only spontaneously and also scientifically (cf. [ch. 3, a](#) and [b](#)): we can reach the conclusion that God exists, by a reasoning process, as we shall see. Metaphysics has shown us that we can reach God with our minds. We have seen that being is participated. If all beings are participated, there must be a being *by essence*, which is *Esse* Itself, “to be” itself. Otherwise, how could there be beings at all? Where do they come from? Since they do not come from themselves, they must come from a source or principle which is pure *esse* or “to be”: this is how we have seen it, very schematically, and this is the sketch of every proof to show that God exists. (See [ch. 18, h](#))

However, above this knowledge through reason, there is a higher knowledge of God, which is supernatural, and of this we have two kinds: *faith* is one of the two supernatural ways of knowing God. The other one is much higher: the knowledge of the *blessed in Heaven*: this *beatific vision* is the highest knowledge we can have of God. In fact the “light of faith” is only a dimmed beatific vision. On the other hand, the beatific vision is the same as the knowledge of our faith, but much more clear: the “light of faith” (*lumen fidei*) is only a lower degree of the “light of glory” (*lumen gloriae*). But they are of the

same kind, since there are two types of knowledge of God:

(i) the “natural” knowledge, in the “light of reason” (*lumen rationis*); and

(ii) the “supernatural” knowledge, which has two degrees: beatific vision (*lumen gloriae*) and faith (*lumen fidei*).

The ranking is, of course, from the highest to the lowest: light of glory, light of faith, and light of reason. The difference between the higher two is only a difference of degree, while the difference between the higher two and the lowest is a difference of kind.

Not only can man know God, but in actual fact the purpose of man's being is precisely *to know and to love God*. He has been created for that, as the catechism says. Why does God want men to be born, to come into being? Because in that way, there are more who can know and love Him: and this is very good *for them*. The contraceptive mentality is the result of metaphysical blindness. Human life is a gift from God: to be is better than not be (cf. [ch. 19, g](#)). The purpose for which human beings are procreated is to know and to love God, which is the highest thing they can do: other ends can only be intermediate to this one. And if man does not pursue this end, he frustrates his own nature: this is his greatest need, and thereby his greatest duty, and thereby his greatest right, his most basic right.

b. Natural theology as highest achievement of metaphysics

We have said that natural theology, i.e. the philosophical knowledge of God, is the most that philosophy can attain regarding God. But in spite of being rather meager in comparison to faith and to the beatific vision, in spite of being only a modest achievement, it *is* the highest achievement of metaphysics, and metaphysics is the highest achievement of reason.

Natural theology studies subsistent *esse*, which is God. While its “material” object is God, its “formal” object is *God as being*, as the source or First Cause of all being. Its “light” (formal object *quo*, or *lumen sub quo*) is simply “natural” reason. And its method is, again, that of metaphysics, which consists in observing reality, looking at reality as it appears to us in the senses, reaching principles therefrom through the intelligence, and then deducing from principles.

Thus, with his natural reason and starting from creatures, man rises to the top of his knowing capabilities when he knows God as one and unique, principle and end, subsistent being itself (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*), all perfect and Creator. Metaphysics thus brings man to the limits he can attain by himself, up to threshold of *supernatural*

theology, which is founded on divine revelation and faith, whereby God reveals Himself in His inner life, i.e. the Trinity in the Unity, grace, redemption, etc.

Therefore, natural theology provides the basis and the springboard, so to speak, towards the knowledge of revelation. In supernatural theology, the “material” object is also God (like in natural theology), but the “formal” object differs from that of natural theology, because while the latter is “God as Being”, the former is God as Himself, as He reveals Himself: *God as God (sub ratione deitatis)*. And likewise, while the “light” of natural theology is natural reason, that of supernatural theology is faith, which is higher than reason alone.

c. Philosophy cannot ignore God

The question of God is central in philosophy always. There is not a single philosopher who has not tackled this question one way or another. We cannot avoid God: wherever we look we have to face the question, since man's mind and will are oriented to infinity. Likewise, the stand taken by a philosophy with regard to God colors and determines its entire scope, since the whole of reality depends on God, who gives ultimate meaning to it. We could say simply, “Tell me what this philosopher says about God, and I will tell you the rest of his philosophy”. This is the crucial question: What does this philosophy say about God? Practically all philosophy is ordained to the knowledge of God, and of the creaturehood of beings.

d. Reason is led to God

The “natural” knowledge of God is the conclusion of a reasoning process. It is a fact, however, that without any complex demonstration, there is a spontaneous natural knowledge of the existence of God. This can be shown by looking at all peoples. There is not a single nation without religion, even the most backward nation. They all believe in some sort of divinity, in something superior to themselves, for which to live and to be accountable. Nevertheless, even this type of spontaneous knowledge of the divinity is not an immediate or intuitive knowledge, like knowing that the day follows the night.

How do we know the difference between trees and bushes, between cats and dogs? Because we see them. But if we know that God exists, even with a spontaneous, pre-scientific knowledge, this knowledge already involves some sort of a reasoning process,

however elementary, since we do not see God. The problem then is that in this reasoning *process* there may be *influences* from factors such as environment upbringing and emotional biases.

And what does philosophy do then with that kind of spontaneous knowledge? It makes it more *precise* and more *explicit*. How? By clarifying that this process involves the passage from knowing the world as an *effect*, to knowing God as the *cause* of this effect. And this is done even on that level of common sense.

e. Reason not the only factor in our knowledge of God

This knowledge of God, however, is not an exclusively intellectual challenge. It is inevitably related to life and to morality, to what is right and wrong in human decision and action. This is why the inner disposition of the will and the emotions has a great influence on a man's knowledge of God. A person with a good disposition, with a good will, is more ready to see the clarity of this conclusion: *God must exist*. But it is a "conclusion", i.e. the ending of a reasoning process; and in this "process", the will may intervene by moving reason to *look for* objections, since the ego may resent the existence of Someone above himself out of pride.

Reason, nevertheless, can prove by itself that God exists by showing the necessity of a cause for the universe of beings: this type of proof whereby we go from effect to cause is called *a posteriori*, which means going from what is "after", namely the effect, to what is "before" (prior), namely the cause. We shall presently see the various ways in which we can expound this argument, but we can already say that it is not reasonable to deny that reason can do this, and so fall into *agnosticism*.

f. Agnosticism is unreasonable

Agnosticism is not the same as atheism. The latter denies that God exists, but the former denies that God can be known, if He exists: it is rather a suspension of judgment regarding the existence of God, disguised in an alleged intellectual "humility". But aside from the fact that humility, as every moral virtue, is rooted in the will rather than in the intellect, "intellectual humility" consists precisely in *submitting* to the evidence of truth, *not* in falling into skepticism, i.e. the pride of not wanting to accept the truth because it does not come from oneself.

Although human knowledge starts from the sensible world, and of course God is *not sensible*, *nevertheless God can be known* as the

First Cause of the sensible world. An agnostic may say, “I know that something exists when I can see it or *touch* it”. But this is not reasonable, since there are myriads of things we cannot see or touch and still we know that they exist, because we have no grounds for doubting the testimony or proof for their existence. If God could be “seen”, He would not be God, since a pure spirit is not sensible. Our knowledge does begin with the sensible, but we can discover God as the cause of the sensible, i.e. if we are willing to perceive the difference between senses and intelligence (only the intelligence can “see” a cause *as cause*, as we saw in [ch.18](#)).

We cannot reach the knowledge of God's existence by asking, *what* is the world? or *how* is the world?, but only by asking, *why* is the world? It is the *why* that leads to God, and it is the question every human being asks himself. Why is there a universe? The answer cannot consist in just describing *how* the various constellations of stars were formed in space due to physical forces, or *how* life began on earth: the *why* or *what for* probes much deeper (see, the difference between science and wisdom: [ch. 6, d](#)).

Incidentally, that God can be known by natural reason is a *dogma of the Catholic faith*, defined by Vatican Council I in 1869. If someone says, therefore, that reason cannot prove that God exists, and he is a Catholic, he contradicts his own faith. The Church did not state exactly what actual proofs should be given, but that *reason alone can prove that God exists, starting from His creatures*, and the biblical texts referred to were Wisdom 13:1-5 and Rom. 1:20. Agnosticism is therefore unacceptable for a Catholic. Difficulties in this regard are: rather *moral* than “intellectual”, since the disposition of the will is involved. Hence the advice Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer used to give people in these circumstances: to make a good sacramental confession, so as to revive the faith, and if the person was not a Catholic, to pray with humility and confidence since the entire person is involved in this matter, not just his intellect.

g. Importance of the rational demonstration of God's existence

Why is it important for the Christian to know the proofs of God's existence by reason alone? At first a Christian knows that God exists not by “reason”, but perhaps because his parents told him or because he learned it from the catechism. It is therefore usually by “faith” that a Christian knows first that God exists: God's existence is part of the Christian *faith* (cf. Heb. 11:6).

However, if later in life, when the person becomes more

mature, he can see that this is a very reasonable truth, that reason by itself can prove that God exists, his faith will be strengthened: he will be confirmed in his beliefs as being very reasonable. And besides, he can prove to others that this is true by reason alone, at least clearing the intellectual side of the problem. (See [ch. 3, a](#))

Lastly, as we saw above, there is a natural link between “natural” and “supernatural” knowledge, and so it is very useful to see their correspondence and correlation both for reason and for faith.

h. Limits of the human knowledge of God

God *can* then be known by man. Now, however, we have to balance this statement. One thing is to say that God can be known by man, and quite another to say that man can know God *perfectly well*. The knowledge man can attain of God is *true*, but extremely imperfect. Agnosticism is unreasonable, but so would be the opposite extreme (whether ontologism or rationalism). God is, of course, *incomprehensible* to man, due to the lack of proportion between the finite human mind and the infinity of God. This, however, does not mean that God is unknowable to man: He is precisely so knowable (fullness of intelligibility because of fullness of being) to man, that man can know (and love) God always more and more, although man can never *comprehend* God, i.e. understand God completely.

And how do we know God with human reason alone?

(i) We can know the existence of God as *cause* of creatures, and thereby

(ii) we can affirm of God, to an infinite degree, all the perfections of the creatures, having of course purified them from all limitations, and having excluded those which involve imperfection in themselves, such as the properties of matter like size, weight, etc. (See [ch. 19, h](#), and [20, a](#))

What is the result of this? In comparison with all other human knowledge, this is the greatest treasure man can acquire. But in comparison with what God will reveal to us in Heaven, and with what He tells us through faith, it is very little indeed. However, it should not be despised, and should be eagerly studied for all the reasons just given.

i. The problem of atheism

After having discussed that type of factual atheism we have

called agnosticism, let us now take a look at atheism proper, i.e. the belief that God does not exist.

How can there be atheists if it is so clear that God exists? We have already seen that our knowledge of God is not direct, but *indirect*, i.e. through a reasoning *process*. And, in this process, other factors intervene coming from outside reason, such as will, emotions, environmental influences, etc. In addition to this, our reasoning process itself is not infallible: we have daily experience of our mistakes in reasoning. Man's denial of God is, therefore, a real possibility.

We can distinguish two types of atheism. There is a type of atheism which does not consist in denying that God exists, but *ignoring* God, living as if God did not exist: it is called *practical* atheism (the practical atheist may even be a church-goer). This type is more common than the other, I which is called *theoretical* atheism. Theoretical or doctrinal atheists actually affirm that God does not exist, and use "arguments" to "prove" it.

Both types of atheism, however, involve the intervention of the will: they really *want* to deny God. Why so? Because *it is impossible to prove conclusively that God does not exist*, since He is entirely beyond the direct reach of our reason. In this sense, the agnostic position is less unreasonable, since it does not *deny* that God exists. Therefore, since no argument can conclude with certainty that God does not exist, one needs *to want to* be an atheist in order to be one. The conclusion is not that "God does not exist", but rather "I don't want God to exist", because "it would be very uncomfortable, since then I would have to renounce things which I am not willing to give up, etc." It is then, as we said, a *moral* rather than an *intellectual* problem.

j. The principle of immanence

The root of all modern atheistic philosophies, such as Marxism, some forms of existentialism, or of logical positivism, meta-psychology, etc. (see, History of Philosophy) is the philosophical *principle of immanence*.

It started with Rene Descartes, who lived in the first half of the 17th century. According to him, *human thought is prior to being*: things are or exist in so far as they are *in human consciousness*. Before Descartes, we could say that reality is there, and then man comes along and gets to know it. But from Descartes on, human thought is the first reality: the rest comes from it in one way or another. This is the man-centered world we mentioned in [ch. 4, c](#), and [ch. 8, d](#), based on the principle of immanence. "Immanence" means *remaining in*: *philosophy begins in human consciousness and remains there* (see

ch. 47, b). This is the philosophical principle of immanence, which has inevitably led to all sorts of atheism. If man is the creator of being, "God" must be removed.

Sometimes, these efforts have been made in the name of "humanism". From the negation of God, one might think that there would follow an exaltation of man. If "man is the creator", "we are humanists: we believe in man"; "*homo homini deus*"; "we want to oust God, so that man can live" and so forth. This is the language of Marx, of Feuerbach, of Nietzsche, of Sartre, etc.

But what has actually happened? Human life has reached its lowest quotation in our century. Instead of being ennobled or exalted, man has been degraded and devalued, being reduced to economic categories, herded into war massacres, extermination camps and abortion clinics, in unbelievably astronomic figures. This is because if man is left without God, he does not know where to go: he has no goal, and so he is lost. And to tell him then that "he is the creator of the world" is only adding salt to the wounds.

Atheism is a cruel deception. A "humanistic" philosophy affirming that there should be no God, so that man can live, is a big swindle. If man is taken away from God, he has no one to appeal to, and so ends up victimized by the mighty. It is the "survival of the fittest", like in the jungle. This is the problem of atheism: a moral problem, highly moral and metaphysical. It is a real problem, which cannot be dismissed.

CHAPTER 6

The Nature of Philosophy

a. History and etymology of the term

What is philosophy? As we have said, it is just common sense, i.e. contact with reality, but deepened through receptivity and reflection.

St. Thomas explains the meaning of the word “philosophy” at the beginning of one of his major works: the *Summa contra gentiles*. He wrote many books, but his two major works are the two Summas. *Summa* means a synthesis or collection of topics of discussion arranged in order. While the *Summa contra gentiles* was written in his early life, the *Summa theologiae* is more mature. The former is more philosophical: *contra gentiles* means directed to the gentiles, i.e. to those outside the Church. The *Summa theologiae*, on the other hand, is written for Christians, and so it is more theological, but since, as we have seen, philosophy is used by theology, it contains an enormous amount of philosophy as well.

The *Summa contra gentiles* is divided into several books. In the first chapter of the first book, St. Thomas talks about philosophy. He explains that philosophy is the common ground for all mankind, so that through philosophy we can show the gentiles that our faith is the true faith by showing its reasonableness. He then goes on to say that philosophy means almost the same as wisdom. *Philo-sophia* is the love of wisdom.

This word is Greek, and so we have to find out how it came to be used in Greece. Originally the Greeks were using the word *sophia* simply. The word for philosopher was wise- man. Plato, who lived in the 5th century, explains in one of his *Dialogues* how the term philosophy came into existence. He attributes it to Pythagoras, another philosopher, and he says that we can investigate wisdom, we can try to acquire wisdom, but of course we can never achieve complete wisdom or the totality of knowledge, so that, as Socrates put it, the more we know, the more we realize how little we know. He says then that philosophy is like the son of the god of plenty and the goddess of want: at once richest (the greatest aspiration of man) and poorest (his inability to reach the heights). But man can always be a *lover* of wisdom: a philo-sopher.

After the rise of Christianity, the term philosophy began to be used to mean the wisdom which can be attained *by the natural light of reason*, as distinct from that wisdom which is directly touched by faith,

which is theology.

b. Wisdom as knowledge of ultimate causes

We can describe wisdom as the *knowledge of things by their ultimate causes*, as we have said. From the word wisdom comes wiseman or sage or savant: a scholar, an educated or learned man. A savant is a person who has a profound knowledge of reality, who knows the ultimate truths and can give advice and guidance. Sometimes, he is replaced by the fortune-teller, which is a sign of an impoverished culture.

What is the characteristic of wisdom? That it is concerned with the highest and most ultimate causes, and that is why it leads to God. If we start looking for causes, eventually we come to God, the first and ultimate cause of everything. According to the depth of these causes, we Christians can distinguish two levels of wisdom: the lower one, that of reason alone, is *natural wisdom*; and the higher one, that of reason *illuminated* by faith, is *supernatural wisdom*.

St. Thomas says that the greatest wisdom is what he calls *sacred doctrine*: the doctrine revealed by God to man, and all the *implications* which man can draw from that doctrine. This doctrine includes therefore both (i) what can be known about God through His creatures, and (ii) what only He knows but communicates to creatures through divine revelation. It includes (i) revelation known through faith, and (ii) theology.

Example of truth of revelation: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God". Example of a truth of theology: "There is only one God in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit": here there is already an elaboration of theology, although since it has been defined by the Church, it is also a truth of revelation, i.e. implicit in revelation.

Let us recall that all revelation is received by man through faith, and faith is a gift from God; hence the absolute dependence on God in order to acquire supernatural wisdom. Then, in addition to the gift of faith, man receives also as a perfection of the gift of faith, the *gift of wisdom*, one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. So, through this gift of wisdom man understands the meaning of what he believes much better. Supernatural wisdom, then, is not just the gift of wisdom from the Holy Spirit, but *the wisdom acquired by man through faith, theology and the gift of wisdom of the Holy Spirit*.

Now, we must remember that the gift of wisdom of the Holy Spirit is a gift of love, because the Holy Spirit is precisely the love of God. Therefore what matters is not to be a brilliant thinker, but to love God very much (the First Commandment). The depth of supernatural

wisdom depends on the intensity of loving God.

And then on a lower level we have *natural* theology. What is wisdom on the natural level? What we call metaphysics. And what is metaphysics? The study of the ultimate and most universal causes through natural reason, and it reaches up to God and the spiritual beings. We can say that the relationship between the two wisdoms is the same as between reason and faith, philosophy and theology.

c. A wise man orders everything in relation to God

St. Thomas says that it is proper to the sage, to the philosopher, to order all things in relation to, and in the light of the ultimate cause, which is God. *Order* means arranging things in relation to an end or design, relating *means* to *ends*, and it is proper to the mind to do this. So, this is what the wiseman does. When everything in our life is in its place, all related to one ultimate end, everything related to God, then everything is *in order*. On the other hand, the failure of man to relate himself to God is what is called *sin*: the greatest of all disorders. And the work of wisdom consists in putting things back in their place relating them all to God.

Wisdom considers ultimate causes, and above all the *last end*. We must remember that there are *four* causes to account for the being or becoming of anything that comes to be. The presence of intelligence is revealed by those four questions which announce the emergence of intelligence in a person:

- (i) What is this?
- (ii) What is it for?
- (iii) What is it made of?
- (iv) Who made it? (Who brought it into being?)

The first one is called the *formal cause*: it points to the essence of the thing, *what* the thing is. The second is the *final cause*: the end for which it is made, the end or purpose. The third is the *material cause*. And the fourth is the *efficient cause*: agent, maker, producer. So, these are the four: (i) essence or nature, (ii) purpose, (iii) stuff, and (iv) maker. And these four questions also indicate that this is the field of metaphysics, that is, the study of *being*, because the four of them point at being: what is the *being* of this? what *is* it? what *is* it for? what *is* it made of? what brought it into *being*? This is metaphysics: the field of the four causes pointing to the being of things? And it is also the approach of common sense.

Now, wisdom considers ultimate causes and above all the last

end, the *ultimate final cause* of everything that is or comes to be: it judges and orders all things in the most perfect way, that is, related to the last end.

St. Thomas says also that taking into account the type of order, there are different types of wisdom: there are as many types of wisdom as ways of relating things to an end. Accordingly, he mentions four types of wisdom:

(i) *Metaphysics and sciences* (what he calls *speculative sciences*) consider the order which exists in reality — the reality we perceive through our senses, and which man has not made, but only found. The sciences look at reality and parcel it out among themselves. Each of them looks at one aspect of it: physics, chemistry, biology, etc. And then, metaphysics studies all these realities *in relation to the last end*.

(ii) The second type is *moral philosophy*: the study of the free actions of man in relation to the last end, or how man ought to behave in relation to his last end.

(iii) The study of the order that human reason makes in its own operations of acquiring knowledge and organizing it: this is *logic*. This is the most difficult study, since we have to make the greatest effort of reflection: to look at our own thinking. While in metaphysics and the sciences we look at reality directly, in moral philosophy we have to make an effort of reflection to look at our own behavior, and in logic even more so, as we look at our own thinking.

(iv) Lastly, we have the *practical sciences*, also called *arts*, the type of knowledge which is directly concerned with *making things*. Art in Greek is *techne*, hence technique or technology. It is also wisdom in so far as things are related to ends, *made* for some *purpose*.

This shows also that the mind has two functions: (a) reception, and (b) action. On the one hand, it gathers information and knowledge, and on the other, it orders things to practice. But for practical action, knowledge is required. In order to acquire any technique or art, one has to study. This means that speculative wisdom or the *reception* of knowledge is higher and more important than practical wisdom, and prior to it.

“Speculative” comes from a Latin verb which means mirroring (*speculari, speculum*): what the mind does is to *mirror* reality. But then, it also *acts* on reality, it makes things, and that is *practice*, which comes from the Greek for action of making: *praxis*. On the other hand the Greek for reception, looking at, is *theorem*; hence, “theory” and “practice”.

d. Wisdom as science

Wisdom is also science, in fact it is the head of the body of sciences. It directs and judges the other sciences, because the other sciences *take for granted* what metaphysics *studies*, namely the most fundamental truths about reality: What is being? What are the first principles of being and reason? Any science, like physics or chemistry, takes for granted that *a thing cannot be itself and another in the same sense*. What metaphysics does is precisely to look at this principle (called the principle of non-contradiction). What is *to be*? What is *to be itself*? and *to be another*? These are the questions asked by metaphysics (wisdom), and that is why its position is like the head in relation to the body of all the sciences.

Metaphysics, however, is also science, because it studies the causes of things, and this is what science is, as we have seen: accurate knowledge through causes. But it goes beyond all the other sciences, since it is not satisfied with knowing *immediate or proximate causes*, as other sciences do, but looks for *ultimate causes*: this is what makes it *wisdom* (in the natural order).

e. Philosophy and the other sciences

St. Thomas explains the difference between philosophy and the other sciences by saying that the degrees or types of science can be classified according to the various degrees of *elevation above matter*. It is very important to understand this point well.

“Matter” is the word we use to designate the world we perceive through our senses, the *sensible* world or corporeal world (world of bodies). Now, the first characteristic of this sensible world is that *it is in continuous change*. But science (*episteme* in Greek) is precisely a *stable* knowledge, a knowledge that does not change. It is our understanding of things that changes, but we aim at permanent knowledge, true and valid always and everywhere. A scientific proposition may be expanded, modified, enriched, or discarded, but to be scientific at any stage it has to be stable and permanent. Without stability, there is no accuracy, no necessity, no science. But since matter is the ground of change, in order to reach real scientific knowledge of reality we have to *rise above matter, so to speak*.

This is what sciences do. First, they rise a little above matter (which is always changing) in order to discover *general* and *stable* patterns and laws in material bodies. This is the level of the *sciences of nature*. “Nature” in general means the sensible world. It comes from the Latin *natura*, which means “what is born”, what comes to be, anything that *moves* from being something to being something else,

from non-being to being. In Greek the word for nature is *physis*, hence the terms “physics” and “physical”. The object of these physical or natural sciences is, therefore, all bodies or corporeal beings, i.e. *those in whose definition sensible matter enters* (men, animals, plants, and inanimate bodies, whether solid, liquid or gaseous). This is the first degree of elevation above matter. Here we no longer consider *this* or *that* sensible being, but sensible being *as such*, i.e. *abstracted* from its individual and changing conditions: in its *common* (universal) and *permanent* reality. These sciences are difficult because of the effort of abstraction or rising above matter.

Then there is a second degree or level of elevation above matter, wherein we study beings which although cannot exist without matter *can be thought of or conceived without matter*, with a complete abstraction from matter. Sensible matter does not enter in their definition, since they can be conceived without it. These are *abstract quantities or dimensions*, whether continuous (lines, surfaces, solids) or discrete (numbers). Quantity cannot exist alone without matter, but it can be conceived without matter. The science of abstract quantities is called mathematics, and its greater difficulty lies in that it requires a greater effort of abstraction or elevation above matter, but this makes it also more certain and accurate, and thus very useful for the physical sciences, which, on the other hand, are more immersed in reality.

Lastly, we come to the third and highest level of elevation above matter, wherein we consider beings which *can both exist without matter and be conceived without matter*. At this level, we do not look at sensible being as such, or quantity as such, but at *being* as such. And *to be* does not imply any matter at all or any change. To walk, to fall, to eat, to write, to cry or any other such act does, but not to be or the *act of being*. “To be” is wider than any act we can think of. To focus on being requires, therefore, the highest degree of elevation above, or separation from matter. This separation is not a flight from, but a much more pervasive penetration into reality, into reality as such, beyond all the differences of changes and quantities. It is the level of meta-physics or trans-physics (meta- or trans- means beyond). At this level, all realities can be looked at, both (i) those which exist and are conceived without matter, such as God and spiritual beings, and (ii) those which may or may not exist without matter, such as substances and accidents. Let us now take a first look at this highest of all sciences (wisdom) on the natural level.

CHAPTER 18

Being and Causality

a. Elucidation of terms

What is causality? The act of causing. And what is “to cause”? To bring something *to be*. The study of causality, therefore, is the study of substance (since being is substance) *in its becoming or in its acting upon another*. When the substance comes to be or becomes, it is the *effect* of a cause: “effect” is what comes into being; “cause” is what brings it into being (cf. [ch. 3, a](#); [6, b](#) and [c](#); [7, c](#); [11, a](#); [15, b](#); [16, c](#) and [d](#)).

Causality implies being, but not vice versa. There can be a being without causing: a carpenter can cause a table to be, but if he doesn't, the carpenter is still there. Being does not of itself imply causality. In fact, being implies neither being *caused* nor *causing*, because, again, there may be a being which is not caused: this is God, the Being which has not been caused, since He is the fullness of being.

But has not God caused the universe? Yes, but *freely*, as we saw: there is no *necessity* for Him to cause (cf. [ch. 16, c](#)). The being of God, being perfect, does imply activity, but it does not imply necessarily an activity *ad extra* ([ch. 17, e](#)). Since the being of God is perfect, it must be active, but with an activity identical with His being. Created being, however, being limited, comes to be through causality: it does not come to be unless it is caused.

b. Origin of the concept of cause: the four causes

How do we form the concept of cause? Through our experience, both what we experience *outside* us and what we experience *within* us. Externally, we see things changing, this thing *comes from* that, this one pushes that one, things cause other things. But we also have our inner experience whereby we see *ourselves performing* acts which we obviously cause: they come from us as from their cause.

Let us now note the important distinction between cause, condition and occasion.

- (i) What characterizes the *cause* is that it *flows* (“influences”,

from Latin *in-fluere* = to flow in) really into the effect.

(ii) The *condition*, on the other hand, is only something which is *required for the cause to produce the effect*; e.g. the climatic *conditions* for certain plants to grow. We may say that a person is “conditioned” by his environment, but that doesn't mean that the environment *causes* him to be this way or that.

(iii) An *occasion* is a situation which favors the actuation of a cause, but it's not the cause itself, like giving someone a present on the occasion of his birthday: the giver is the cause, not the birthday.

In this light, we can say that the cause is a *principle which really influences the becoming or being of the effect*. As we have said, a principle is that from which something comes or proceeds. Not every principle is a cause: a spring is the principle or source of a river, but not its cause. But every cause is a principle.

For example, in the Blessed Trinity, we know that the Son *comes from* the Father, but not as an *effect*. Both are perfect activity, but not cause-effect, since this would mean that the Son is subordinated to the Father, which is a heresy. There is a *proceeding* (procession) of the Son from the Father, but as from a principle which is not a cause in this case.

The cause is a principle which really influences the becoming or being of things. Thus for example, whatever has really influenced this chair in its becoming and in its being is a cause of the chair, namely its materials, the form it has taken, the purpose for which it was made, and the carpenter who made it. In these four cases, not only is there an influence on the *esse* of the chair, but also a *dependence* of the effect on the causes. The metaphysical analysis of motion shows those four principles influencing the effect: maker, material, design and purpose. These are the four causes analyzed above in [ch. 6, c.](#) Let us now take a closer look.

c. Material cause and formal cause: theological relevance

In the case of the chair, the wood is the material cause; and the formal cause is the design. We can notice that the design is both in the mind of the carpenter (i.e. outside the chair) and inside the chair (the form was there potentially in the matter). We can thus distinguish the form *intrinsic to the effect*, and the form *extrinsic to the effect*. The latter is also called *exemplary* cause, because it is the model or design in the mind of the maker.

And what is “material cause”? *That from which and in which something is made*. Here, there are two levels: the substantial and the

accidental. In the latter, the matter is an actually existing substance, and the form is an accident. And on the substantial level, i.e. in the case of substances changing into other substances, the matter is *prime* matter as pure potentiality, and the form is a substantial form or forms.

This point of material causality is relevant to theology for the explanation of supernatural operations in man. When a man performs a supernatural operation, such as for example an act of the supernatural virtue of charity, he can do this, and that operation is supernatural, not because it comes from man, but because God has given him grace to do it. In this case, the material cause of this operation is man, but the formal cause is grace: that act of virtue is materially human, but formally supernatural.

Formal cause is the *form, act or perfection, whereby a thing is or comes to be*: it either determines the matter or is itself a determination by itself. What makes something to be in act in the substantial order or what makes a substance actual is called *substantial form*. And what makes something in act in the accidental order is called *accidental form*. Matter and form are related as potency to act.

Therefore, matter is subordinated to act or form both in reality and *in our knowing*: for a thing to be, its matter has to be actualized by the form; but also in our knowing, we know things only in so far as they are *determined*, and this comes from the form. The form is thus superior to the matter, more noble and perfect than the matter. The matter is for the sake of the form (see [ch. 15, b](#)).

The highest type of created form is the pure form of the angels, since the only potency it has in the substantial order (not in the accidental) is the potency to the act of being. On the other hand, material substances like man, have in the substantial order not only the potency to the act of being, but also the potency of matter to form. In other words, the angel is more an act than man, although it is not a pure act as far as the *esse* is concerned, because it has received the act of being. It is pure act only as an essence, since it is not limited by any matter, but it is an essence which has received the act of being, so that with regard to the act of being it is still a potency.

d. The efficient cause: creation and causality

According to our manner of knowing, the efficient cause is the first one we call cause: it is the one we usually refer to when talking about causes. What is the efficient cause or agent? *What makes something to be*, what actually brings about the reality of something?

The topic of efficient causality has been a very delicate matter in the history of theology and philosophy. If “to produce an effect” means “to give being”, the problem arises as to the difference between the causality of God and the causality of creatures.

Creatures do indeed cause other things to be, they truly produce beings. Nevertheless, there have been doctrines which, in order to emphasize the causality of God, have said that creatures don't really cause. At the most, they are “instruments” of God only: they don't cause anything by themselves. But if we deny the causality of creatures in order to emphasize or to exalt divine causality, what we do in fact is to belittle the power of God, since *it shows more power to be able to share His active potency with His creatures than not to share it with them*.

This problem has been highly elucidated by the doctrine of *creation*, as distinct from the causality of creatures (see [ch. 24, e](#)). Creation is the *total* production of being: the effect of the absolutely first and total cause of the *esse*. On the other hand, the causality of creatures is not *creative*, since it only *transforms* things into other things: they produce the *becoming* (*fieri* in Latin) of things, not the *esse* of things. When we produce or cause, we transform; God creates. This is why these created causes are called *second causes*. They are indeed real causes, not just instrumental: just as God shares His being with His creatures, He also shares His activity, His causality. Just as the being of creatures is participated, limited, imperfect, but it *is* real being, the causality of creatures is also participated, limited and imperfect, but it is real causality.

In every real *second cause*, God acts by moving it as First Cause, and that divine motion is precisely the foundation of the causality of creatures. If we deny the causality of the creature, we deny his freedom and therefore his responsibility.

This is why it is very important to show the metaphysical reality of the causality of creatures. We do really cause, with all the imperfection you want, but we cause, and therefore we are responsible for our actions. This is what we said above, that in our inner experience we see ourselves causing effects with *free choices* on our part. This is indeed real causality. Admittedly, when we produce an effect, the *being* of the effect is not exactly produced by us: what we produce is the *transformation*, but the being is already there somehow. When the carpenter makes the table, does he produce the being of the table? Not exactly, because the thing was already there: the materials were there. What he does is to put together the materials in such a way that there is a new form: it is a transformation; he makes it *become*, not *be*. But, with all its limitations, created causality is real causality.

We said that the *modus operandi* follows the *modus essendi*. This means that there are *necessary* causes which act in a *necessary* way; *contingent* causes which act in a *contingent* way; and *free* causes which act in a *free* way. The last case is that of spiritual agents (men, angels, God). The fact that there is always a cause for every effect does not contradict our freedom of causing or not causing, as we shall see in the metaphysics of man.

e. The instrumental cause

The division of the efficient cause into *principal* and *instrumental* is extremely important in theology, e.g. in the matter of the inspiration of the writers of the Bible; in the sacraments (how they cause grace); how the priest acts as a cause, for example, in the Eucharist. This division into principal and instrumental is different from the division into *first* and *second* cause: the first cause is God; all other causes are second causes.

The instrumental cause is *that which does not act only by virtue of its form but by virtue of the fact that it is moved by the principal agent*. Therefore, the effect of the instrumental cause corresponds to the form of the principal agent. For example, the pen in writing does not act only by virtue of its own form: the form of the pen would not by itself be able to achieve that effect.

However, the instrument may be a *free person* or a material instrument. How do they differ? The free person is free and intelligent, whereas the material instrument has only a very limited power, limited to its form.

God can also use men as His instruments, but then He takes into account their own power, their intelligence and freedom.

There are instruments which are *joined* to the agent (e.g. one's hand), and instruments which are *separated* (e.g. the pen). Thus, the sacraments are effects of God, but the sacraments themselves are causes of grace. Grace is the effect of the sacraments. The humanity of Christ is the instrument joined to the agent, in this case the Divine Person. The principal efficient cause is the Divine Person; the instrumental joined cause is the humanity of Christ; the instrumental separated cause is the sacrament; the effect is grace (which is also the *formal* cause of sanctification), and the material cause is man himself (the doctrine on the sacraments is deeply metaphysical).

The instrument has an instrumental action which it performs not by its own power, but by the power of the principal agent *which flows into the instrument transitorily*, i.e. as long as the principal agent is using it. But it also has an action of its own, according to its own form,

whereby this instrument is good for certain actions only. For example, the pen can only be used for writing, and when God acts through men as instruments He respects their (free) nature and personality.

Lastly, the *instrumental* action is not performed except through the action *proper* to the instrument: the pen can write beautiful poems but only as long as it is used with its own power. This also means that if God uses men as instruments, He does so taking into account their own capabilities. It may also happen, however, that God uses instruments which are inadequate or out of proportion: in this case, He uses an extraordinary grace. But in any case, it is clear that a minimum of proper power is always required: an animal cannot be sanctified by God, for it is absolutely incapable; but a man can, no matter how imperfect he may be. *Some* proper power has to be used for the instrument to reach an effect of the principal efficient cause.

f. The final cause: cause of all causes

The final cause *motivates* the efficient cause to act. The efficient cause is the one that properly acts, and it acts by determining the material cause through the formal cause. The material and formal causes do not act: they cause each other. It is the efficient cause that acts, and it does so by either *drawing the form from the matter* thereby determining the matter, or *giving the matter a form*, thereby also determining the matter: the formal cause always determines the material cause. Material causality is exercised on the formal cause by *receiving* it, and formal causality is exercised on the material cause by *determining* it. But this mutual causality occurs only when the efficient cause acts on them. And the efficient cause acts *for the sake of* the final cause. This is, then, the *cause of all causes*. It is called “final” or last in the sense that it is the last to be reached. But on the other hand it is the first, because it sets the whole process of causality in motion: *first in intention, last in execution*.

Nothing happens, nothing changes or moves in nature without an end, without a direction. This end may itself be an intermediate end, in the sense that it is not the absolutely last end, but there is always an end in everything that moves in nature: everything acts according to its nature, a nature which is determined by an end, e.g. the preservation of the species. This is obvious in the case of intelligent beings, who always act for a purpose. This “acting for a purpose” is precisely the mark of intelligence. Non-intelligent beings also act for a purpose, but they are not conscious of it.

All things point to an end in nature, which leads us to think of the last end of all, as we shall see in the next chapter. The fact that all

things tend to an end is what gives the impression of the universe being *in order*. Order is *the arrangement of things in relation to an end*. “Orderly universe” in Greek is *cosmos*, and its opposite is *chaos*.

g. Direction to end; freedom and love: the order of the universe

While intelligent agents direct themselves to an end freely, non-intelligent agents have no freedom: they direct themselves to their end necessarily. But in both cases, there is direction to an end. Non-intelligent agents are directed by nature, while intelligent agents direct themselves because they know and recognize the end as end, and then they choose the appropriate means. Their freedom does not consist therefore in choosing ends in the sense of making new ends, but in the sense of choosing the right ones which are already there.

My freedom does not consist in doing whatever I like, but in doing what I am supposed to do *without any coercion from outside*, as we shall see in the metaphysics of man. In the subordination of ends, there is one which must be the last; otherwise there would be no ends at all. That *last end* then is *loved* for its own sake and above everything (“sake” is an archaic English word meaning “love”). Tendency to an end is precisely what “love” means: a tendency to a suitable or fitting end, a tendency to the *good*.

Only man, in this material universe, can recognize the absolutely last end: that for the sake of which ultimately everything happens, the supreme good, God. Only man can therefore love God. Creatures below man cannot understand this subordination of ends to the last one, and thus can neither know nor love God: there is no religion below man. This is why also all other creatures in the material universe are for the sake of man, and man is for the sake of God.

h. Importance of the principle of causality

We can formulate the principle of causality as follows: *If there is motion, there is something that moves, and something must move it*. We can also say that “every effect implies a cause”, but for this to avoid being a tautology (a statement in which the subject and predicate are identical), it is better to say: *What comes to be or what is moved, comes to be or is moved by another*.

Here we focus on “coming to be” or “being”.

The most profound formulation of this principle, given by St. Thomas, states that *everything which exists by participation is caused*

by *what exists by essence*. St. Thomas says that God is the “subsistent to be itself”: *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. The *esse* is never subsistent in us: it is what makes us subsistent, but it does not subsist by itself, because it exists participated in an essence. It is only the *esse* of God that has no essence to limit it, to participate it, and so It subsists by Itself. Our subsistence is limited; our being is participated; our causality is participated; everything in us is participated. But whatever exists by participation must be caused by what exists by essence: God is the Creator of all things.

Modern philosophy has often-questioned the validity of the principle of causality, thus threatening to blow up the rational bridge for us to prove the existence of God. This was done, for example, by David Hume, a philosopher who lived in the 18th century, who did his very best to prove that the principle of causality is not universally valid. This would make “belief” in God something subjective, which therefore could not have external or social manifestations: society should be religiously neutral.

But how could anybody deny the evidence that “whatever comes to be, must come to be by another”? How did Hume manage to “disprove” this? Simply by saying that we get the *idea* of cause through our senses, by seeing certain phenomena *usually* follow other phenomena. If I apply fire to the wood, the wood burns. The phenomenon of lighting the fire is followed by the phenomenon of burning the wood. This is what we observe through our senses. Phenomenon X is *usually* followed by phenomenon Y. And then we take a jump from saying that “Y is *after* X” to saying that “Y is *because* of X”: we turn a *post hoc* into a *propter hoc*. But this jump is “illegal”, he says. Why do we take it? Because we have this habit, and we have turned it into a “universal” principle.

What is wrong with Hume's approach is that he stays *only on the level of the senses* (cf. [ch. 9](#)). That is why he says that we cannot take the “jump” from “after” to “because”. But we can see the fallacy of this argument by showing that “succession of phenomena” is not the same as “causality”. The intelligence perceives the difference very clearly (the senses do not). For example, does the fact that the night follows after the day mean that it is “caused” by the day? Obviously not: here then we have a case of succession without any causality involved. The intelligence perceives the difference between succession and *production*, not the senses, which only see “phenomena”, i.e. appearances.

CHAPTER 7

Metaphysics or First Philosophy

a. *The science of being as being*

Aristotle calls metaphysics “first philosophy”, first in the sense of “primary”. It is the philosophy which studies being *as being*, and the properties of everything that is *real*, as distinct from what is imaginary or mental. This “real being”, however, is known through a concept of the mind. When we talk about “being” in metaphysics, we are not talking about any being in particular, but being as applied to *every real thing*. Being, then, is the first object of the intelligence, as we just saw in examining the four questions that lead to the four causes. Without the concept of being, the intelligence would not be able to know anything: there would be only *sensible* knowledge, not intelligent knowledge.

If we look at any concept that we have in our mind, such as “child” or “house”, we see that they all imply the concept of being: *to be* is what everything boils down to. Being is to the intelligence what light is to the eyes: in order to see we need light; in order to understand we need being (what *is* this or that? we ask with our intelligence).

Now, *being* is implied not only in every concept that we have, but also *in every judgment that we make*. Our mind not only grasps concepts, but affirms and denies by making statements. These affirmations or negations are acts whereby our mind agrees with reality, and then they are true, or disagrees with it, and then they are false. Every concept implies being, but also every judgment implies being or reality, because it implies ultimately the first of all the judgments, the most simple of all: *being is not non-being*.

This first judgment is the most simple because it uses the most elementary concepts. Using the first concepts, which are being and non-being, the first judgment states that being is not non-being. In other words, “*what is*” *cannot in the same sense be something else*. This is called the *principle of non-contradiction*. It is the most self-evident statement we can make, and it is implied in every other judgment. When I say that the door is closed, this implies that it cannot be closed and open at the same time. Contradiction is impossible.

“Contradiction” is a very precise concept: it means the clash of two statements which are incompatible absolutely; one is the negation of the other. It is the opposition of two statements, one of which is the negation of the other. When I say “the door is closed”, the contradiction of this is “the door is not closed”. These two statements

cannot be both true in the same sense, or false in the same sense. Two contradictory statements cannot be both true in the same sense or false in the same sense. The principle of non-contradiction states that being and non-being are contradictory: both of them cannot subsist in the same subject. This is the real basis of our reasoning and communicating with one another. If we were to deny this principle, then we could not communicate at all with one another, because when saying something, the opposite would also be true.

A thing cannot be itself and another in the same sense, but also: *a thing is always what it is*. This second statement is what we call the *principle of identity*, which is logically second to the principle of non-contradiction. These two principles are all the time assumed in our day-to-day conversation and in every science: they are not proved or discussed, but just taken for granted. But what metaphysics does is to look into them and into the first concept (being), and try to understand them, so as to understand reality in its ultimate and deepest causes.

b. Substance and accidents, potentiality and actuality

We have started with *being* and the *first principles* of being and of reasoning. Now, what is the first thing we notice about real being? That there are certain realities that cannot exist *by themselves*, like color or size, or activities such as thinking or writing. The first thing we have to do, therefore, is to distinguish between what exists only *in another* and what exists *by itself*: the latter is called *substance* and the former *accident*. This is then the first division or classification of being.

“Substance” comes from the Latin verbs *substare* and *subsistere*: the first means “to stand under” and the second “to stand by itself”. In the first sense, it means that it may be the subject of other realities which exist *in it* (accidents). The second meaning points more to the essential aspect of substance: to subsist or to exist by itself. “Accident” comes from the Latin verb *accidere*, which means “to fall on top of”.

For example, the color of this table is in the table, i.e. it is an accident of the table. The thoughts in my mind are accidents that exist in my mind, and my mind exists in me as a person. It is the person that is the “being by itself” (substance), not the mind or the thoughts, which are accidents. This does not mean that the accidents are less or exist less than the substance: in fact they may be even part of the essence of the substance. For example, it is of the essence of man to have a mind, but the mind is “accidental” in the metaphysical sense. In metaphysics, “accidental” is not the opposite of “essential”, but of “substantial”, while in logic (which deals with concepts, not with

realities) “accidental” is the opposite of “essential”.

Now, let us return to the sensible world of *nature* we were discussing above. The first thing that strikes us about it, we were saying, is that it is in continuous *change*. What is the difference between the *sensible* world and the *intelligible* world? The sensible world is the world we see through our senses, while the intelligible world is the world we see through our intelligence. When we “see” being, we see with our intelligence, not just with our eyes. The eyes do not see *being*, they only see color or shapes. But the intelligence sees not only being (and substance and accidents) but also *change*. Change as such is only intelligible, not sensible. It is a concept the intelligence makes out of (a) the concept of *stage before* the change, and (b) the concept of the *stage after* the change. The former is the ability-to-be or capacity-to-be: potency or *potentiality*; and the latter is the being-in-act or *actuality*. Change is the passage from (a) to (b).

In every changeable being, therefore, there is a composition of potentiality and actuality, potency and act. The being of something changeable is *not only what it actually is, but what it can still be*.

Now, let us see how the two things can be put together: on the one hand, the division into substance and accidents, and on the other, the division into potency and act. We observe that substances undergo changes while remaining the same in their being: a tree grows in size while remaining the same tree. In this case, what has been added or subtracted? Accidents. It is the accidents that come and go. The substance has potentially many accidents. Substance is to accidents what potency is to act, and as act perfects potency, so accidents perfect the substance.

And we also observe that substances change not only by addition or subtraction, but by becoming other substances. When a cat dies, the dead cat is no longer a cat, but a conglomeration of substances quickly disintegrating: it has lost its being; one substance has become other substances. This leads us to the next point.

c. Matter and form

We can also observe that substances do not change into *any* sort but into very *specific* substances. If I burn this paper, it will not become milk or jelly, but ashes, and *that* particular type of ashes. When I eat something, it does not turn into gold or silver, but into flesh and bones. This means that before a substance changes into another, it has the *potentiality* to become precisely that one. A substance has not only the potentiality to receive and to lose accidents, but also the potentiality to become other *specific* substances: two types of potentialities, one on the level of the accidents, and the other on the

level of the substance itself.

(i) When the substance receives an accidental actuality (because it has the potentiality, for instance, to become bigger or smaller, and if it actually becomes bigger it receives an accidental actuality), that accidental actuality can be called *accidental form*, and we shall call the bearer or subject of the accidental form, substance or *actual matter*.

(ii) When the substance receives a substantial actuality, it becomes another substance: when the food becomes flesh and bones, the actuality of the flesh and bones is not accidental, but substantial, and we call this substantial actuality *substantial form*, while we shall call the bearer or subject of the substantial form *prime matter*.

Accordingly, in any sensible or corporeal substance there is the following composition: prime matter plus substantial form equal to actual material substance, plus accidental forms equal to individual substance (however, see below, [ch. 15, c](#): the principle of individuation). Therefore, matter is to form, what potency is to act, what substance is to accidents. This is the metaphysical structure of corporeal substance.

Having observed that change in the corporeal world implies matter and form, we can now take these two elements as causes of corporeal substance: we call them *material cause* and *formal cause*. Material cause is *that from which and in which something changes*. Formal cause is *that which determines the change*, i.e. determines the thing to be or become what it is or becomes. Formal cause is related to substantial form and accidental form. “Form” is *what makes something to be what it is*: it determines the *essence* of something. What a thing is, is its essence; what determines it to be the way it is, is its form. And form may be either substantial or accidental.

But material cause and formal cause are not enough to account for corporeal substance. What else is required? For a substance to become another substance the first requirement is potentiality and form. The matter is the potency and the form is the act. But for the egg to become an omelet, a cook is also required: no change is possible without an agent or *efficient cause*. The agent gives the form to the matter or extracts it from it, as the sculptor does. And the characteristic of the efficient cause is that it must be *actual*: it cannot be potential, because nothing acts except *in so far as it is in act*. A potential being as such never acts: only an actual being acts. This observation leads to the proof of the existence of God, as we shall see. For an efficient cause to act, it has to be in act: it cannot be in potency. What follows from this? That nothing can bring itself into act: it needs something else to bring it into act.

So, we have efficient cause, formal cause, material cause. Is

that enough to account for change? What else is required? If we have the egg and the cook, what else is required for making the omelet? The *motivation* of the cook, the end, the purpose. This is the *final cause*: the one that motivates or sets a goal for the agent. We have four causes, therefore, and metaphysics studies *causality* as such: how causes exercise their causality, how effects come from causes.

d. God as the universal cause of being: essence and the act of being

This leads us to see not only corporeal being, but *finite being*, which may be either corporeal or incorporeal. Finite is the opposite of infinite, namely limited. It is a being that *has come* into being, although this does not necessarily imply a *temporal* beginning, but simply that it is caused or received.

If we look at being as such, it has no limits. Why is it that there are beings that do have limits? Because their actuality is limited by their potentiality: a thing *is* no more than what *it can be*. Every being that has come to be is only a *participation* of being. Every finite being is only a participation of being. Every finite being is only a participation, a part of being. This participation, the manner of being of this being, which is different from the manner of being of another being, limits the actuality of being.

The structure of finite being is therefore like this: *manner of being*, whereby a being is a man, for example, limits the *actuality of being*: it cannot be more than that. We call this manner of being *essence*, and the actuality of being the *act of being*. Therefore, the composition of finite being is a *real composition* of the two elements, the essence and the act of being, which are *really distinct*. And this is very important, because it gives us an insight into God. God is the infinite being without *any* composition, because in God the actuality of being is His very essence: pure act of being, the fullness of being, actuality with no potentiality at all. And since we are all participations of being, we all have *received* the act of being, and so we can conclude:

- (i) that being must exist in its fullness, without any participation;
- (ii) that this fullness of being must be what has brought into being all the others.

Metaphysics thus leads inevitably to God, because if the entire universe is made up of finite beings, what (efficient cause) has brought them into being ultimately? We must come to one that is pure act and has not been brought into act from potency. God must exist, or else we cannot explain how things exist at all. And not only must He exist, but

His being consists precisely *in being*, which is not the case with us: my being does not consist in being, but *in being human*, which is a limited *manner* of being. In God His essence is to be. And that is what the Bible says (Exodus 3): God says to Moses, I AM WHO AM. All other things *have* being; God *is* being.

The crowning topic of metaphysics is the study of God (that's why Aristotle called it also theology). This metaphysical study of God is usually called *natural theology*. It studies God as the first and universal *cause* of being: efficient, exemplary (extrinsic formal), and final — *efficient*, in that He brings all things into being; *exemplary*, in that He designs the being of everything in His Wisdom; and *final*, in that He directs everything to Himself as Last End by directing them to the fullness of their being. He is, thus, the *beginning* and *end* of everything. And that's also what the Bible calls Him: *Alpha* and *Omega* (Apoc. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13), i.e. the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

e. The properties of being

Another section of metaphysics studies the properties of being as being. Everything, *in so far as it is a being*, has certain properties, that is, not in so far as it is an animal or a plant or a man, but in so far as it *is*.

These properties are:

(i) in relation to itself, that this being is *one* — unity of being (metaphysics studies the oneness of being, as we shall see below: what makes a thing to be one and not many?);

(ii) in relation to intelligence, every being is called *true* (see below);

(iii) in relation to tendency in general, all things in so far as they exist are called *good*, because they tend to their end, which is their good or perfection, and when we *want* things it is because we think they are good for us.

Metaphysics is thus the education of the mind to become simple, straight and incisive: to see the *obvious*, which is what is usually overlooked. Even the word “obvious” is quite striking: it means “what comes to meet you”.

Those properties are then properties of being as being, not as being *this* or *that*, and therefore they are part of the object of metaphysics, which is being as such. Lastly, when there is a combination of true and good, it is called *beautiful*. Every being fittingly related at once to intelligence and will is called beautiful. We may notice that beauty is something that we perceive in things which

animals do not. It is characteristic of man to perceive beauty in his surroundings: in colors, in sounds, in shapes... Even though we perceive beauty in the *sensible* world, it is the *intelligence* that perceives it: something is desired because it gives delight to the intelligence, so that both the will and the intelligence are involved. The intelligence discovers certain qualities in the object which make it pleasurable to know, like harmony, brightness and completeness. We shall develop these points in [ch. 19](#).

f. Metaphysics and theology

What is then the theological relevance of metaphysics? Its basic relevance stems from the fact that it studies God to the extent possible to *natural* reason. Thus, it studies the relationship of dependence of the creature on the Creator, which is something that is a prerequisite for the *supernatural* life of grace.

Specifically, the topic of *causality* is of capital importance to better understand how men can be instruments of God in the supernatural order. *Instrumental* causality is part of the object of metaphysics, and very relevant to theology. For example, regarding the writers of Holy Scripture, who wrote the Holy Scripture? God is the author, but with the instrumentality of those human writers. And regarding the Sacraments, what causes grace in the soul, the sacrament itself or God? God, but also the sacrament, though instrumentally.

Furthermore, in both the dogma of the Blessed Trinity and that of the Incarnation, we must use metaphysical concepts like person, nature, subsistence, relationship, etc. We shall study all these topics more in detail.

CHAPTER 15

The Essence

a. Elucidation of terms: essence, nature, concept, definition

We have said that *ens* is composed of *esse* (act of being) and essence (potency of being). Literally, “essence” comes from *esse*: if *esse* is “to be”, essence is a “manner of being”. More precisely, it is *what* a thing is, or *that whereby a thing is what it is*: e.g. the essence of man is all that makes man to be man.

The essence can also be called *nature* (e.g. human nature). The word “nature” is used in many senses, as we have seen, but in this particular sense it means *the essence of anything considered as the principle of operations proper to that thing*. “Principle” means origin or source: that from which something comes.

The essence of something, then, considered precisely as the origin or source of the operations proper to it, is called nature. For example, we say that it is in accordance with “human nature” that man enter into association with other men: the operation whereby man associates himself with other men flows from his nature, i.e. from the essence of man, in so far as it determines the operations, so that these operations are *proper* to man, and are therefore called human.

We can also understand the essence as the *metaphysical determination* of the substance: if we say, “this is a substance”, the next question is, “what sort of substance?”, and the answer to this question expresses the essence or determination of the substance. What about the accidents? Have they no “essence”? Strictly speaking, no, because they are or exist only *in relation to* the substance, as we saw.

What in metaphysics is called essence, in logic is called the *concept*. Concept is the expression of an essence (of any manner of being, including that of accidents) in the mind. And when this expression is actually explicitated in the mind, it is called *definition*.

There is an important difference between essence and definition, aside from the fact that one is on the level of being and the other on the level of concepts. For example, “man” as an *essence* is whatever every human being is: just one reality, not many. On the other hand, we *define* man as “a rational animal”. What is the difference? When we explain (define) the essence, we display all the *parts* of it, but this doesn't mean that in reality it has parts. In reality, the essence is always simple, but when it is defined by the mind, it

becomes composite: it shows parts. Why this? Because our mind is limited, and cannot take the whole meaning of something *at one glance*: it has to divide it up, i.e. to *analyze* it. This is what analysis means, a breakdown: the mind has to analyze reality because it does not understand at a simple glance: it has to go through the process of analyzing and synthesizing (synthesis = opposite of analysis).

First the mind *divides*, and then *composes*. This is how our mind understands. If we were angels, we would be able to *see through*, to understand at one glance with an *intuitive* intelligence (the original meaning of “intelligence”, *intus-legere* in Latin, is to “read into”). The usual thing for us, however, is to understand step by step, which is what we call discursive thinking or *rational* intelligence (cf. [ch. 8, d](#)).

Now, once we realize how we understand, we make a very important discovery: that we cannot confuse the order of concepts with the order of things. We can have many concepts about one simple thing, or we can gather many things in one concept. For example, the concepts of “rational” and “animal” are both applied to the same reality, which is “man” (many concepts about *one* reality). But we can also gather many things into one single concept, as when we gather *all* men into the concept of “man”. This shows that the order of concepts is not the same as the order of things, although it has to be parallel to it: the order of concepts, in order to reflect reality, must follow or go along the order of things. Concept is something in the mind; essence is something real.

b. Essence and form

Form is the determination of the essence: what makes the essence to be what it is.

More specifically, if the being is material, the form is not the only part of the essence. It is what *determines* the being to be the way it is. But if there is a principle of determination, which is the form, there must be a principle of *indetermination*, which is what makes this material being to be *material*. The essence of a material thing, then, is made up of form *and* matter. The matter is what makes the being have *quantitative parts*. My materiality, in so far as it makes me have parts, is the same as the materiality of the table. That materiality therefore does not distinguish me from other material things: it is therefore the principle of indetermination. But what determines my essence to be the way it is, is the form. Therefore, the essence of a simple or immaterial substance is identical with its form: the form is the entire essence in this case. On the other hand, in composite or material

substances the form is not the entire essence, but only the *formal* part or principle of determination.

How are form and matter related? It is a relationship of determination to indetermination. If we consider matter in relation to form, what does the form do to the matter? It brings a *potential* determination into *actuality*. If matter is considered by itself, it is just pure potentiality of any determination. When it is actually determined, it has passed from potency to act. The relationship of matter to form is thus as potency to act. When observing substantial changes (from one substance to another), we realize very clearly that matter is related to form as potency to act, because before the change takes place, the substance was in potency to become real, and when it actually comes to be, it passes from potency to act: it loses one form and acquires another.

The form is, of course, more important than the matter, since the matter is *for the sake of* the form. We do not live in order to eat, but eat in order to live. The material aspect (the body) is what makes us indeterminate, common to all material things; and so, this material aspect is for the sake of the formal or determinate aspect, which is our *spirituality*: what makes us human. This is why material goods are for the sake of spiritual goods always: this is the metaphysical basis of the social order.

This means also that a cause may exist or have being, regardless of whether its effect exists or not. When we see an effect, we always say, "there must be a cause"; but the opposite is not true. If we apply this to matter and form, it means that while matter cannot be without form, form *of itself* does not require matter. In the case of man, the body is *for* the soul, and the soul does not have to be joined necessarily to the body. In the case of spiritual substances (angels), their entire reality consists in their form: they have no matter. On the other hand, in the non-spiritual substances, the form needs the matter in order to subsist, except in the case of the human soul: as we shall see in the metaphysics of man, the human soul is directly created by God. It cannot be extracted from matter, as other forms are, since matter does not have the potentiality to become spirit.

The form then is the *act of the essence*, but we should not confuse it with the *act of being*. The form is the "essential act", what determines the essence to be *what it is*. But what determines the essence *to be* (act of being) is not the same as what determines it *to be what it is* (form).

Now, the *substantial* form is what determines the substance to be what it is, and since it is therefore the determining principle of the substance, it is *unique* and *indivisible* in every substance. It gathers in itself the perfections and all the operations of less perfect forms. Thus,

the human soul, which is the substantial form of man, makes man animal, living, material and substantial: all the perfections and determinations of lower forms are found in the form of man.

And there is a second point regarding the substantial form. *The unity of a being comes from its act*: that is why the most profound reason for the unity of being lies in the ultimate act, which is the *esse*. But on the level of the essence, unity lies in the most profound act on that level, which is the form. We call the former, *transcendental* level (level of *esse*), and the level of the essence, *predicamental* level. We call it “predicamental” because we divide the essences into ten kinds of predicates, which are called the ten predicaments or categories (see [ch. 13, c](#)). And on this level, the most profound root for the unity of being is the form.

Now, let us take a deeper insight into reality and look at the transcendental level, thus called because it *transcends* the categories or predicaments, in the sense that it belongs to all of them without belonging to any of them *exclusively*. In other words, *esse* affects quantity, quality, relation, etc.: *all* the predicaments have *esse*. But *esse* does not belong exclusively to any of them. Can we classify *esse* as one of the predicaments? *To be* cannot be a predicament, because then the others would *not be*. *To be* applies to all of them; it transcends all of them. If we look into the level of *esse*, we can see that the most profound reason for unity is not from the form but from the act of being. The act of being is therefore the ultimate act and the *perfection of all the perfections* of a being, as we said above.

Lastly, the form is the principle of *operation and action* in the sense that, since it determines the manner of being of the substance, it also determines the manner of its operations. In other words, it determines the essence also *as nature*, i.e. as principle of operations. The active potency, i.e. the potency to act in a particular way, therefore, is founded on act, on the *formal* act. Thus, the form, which is a principle of being, is also a principle of action. For example, the form of man is the human soul (it makes man to be man), and so it is the principle of *being a man*, and since the potency of acting is based on the act, the principle of being in man is also the principle of action in man. Human actions come from this principle which is the soul, in the sense that they are determined to be that way by the soul: a man acts according to his nature, which is determined in its manner by the soul.

c. The principle of individuation

What makes beings to be *individual*? John is one *being* because of his *act of being*, one *man* because of his *form*. But what

makes him to be John and not Peter? This is the question on the principle of individuation.

What is an individual? It comes from the Latin *individuum*, which means “undivided”. It implies something which is both (i) *undivided in itself*, and (ii) *divided from everything else*. There may be something which has (i) but not (ii): something which is one in itself, but not divided from everything else, from other things. The concept of “man”, for example, is one in itself, but it is not “divided” from all men: it is found in all men. The individual is one in itself *and* also divided from everything else — *unique*. The unity of man in me is also in you, but my individuality is only in me. The uniqueness of an individual is that it is divided from everything else. In this sense, it is the opposite of *universal*, which is the abstract concept. “Universal” is what is one in itself *but found in many at the same time*. The universal has unity, but it does not have individuality: it is one in many. The sensible world is made up of individual things. We are surrounded by individual beings. There are no concepts walking around: concepts are all in the mind.

After discussing the unity of being on the transcendental level, we also have to ask ourselves this: What about the unity of the individual as such? Where does it come from? This is the analysis of the ultimate and specific reason for the real *concreteness* of essence and form. How are the essence and the form concretized? (By themselves, the essence and the form are not concrete.)

Let us make three important observations. The specific essence is (i) really *multiplied* by the individuals; (ii) *singularized* by them; and (iii) it subsists *substantially* in them. For example, “man” is multiplied by, singularized by, and subsists in John, Peter, etc. (it does not subsist in itself).

Consequently, we can say that the essence of *material* beings must have a substantial potency as the foundation of *multiplication*. This potency cannot be in the form, since the form is act, and thereby a principle of unity, not of multiplicity. Therefore, the principle of individuation is to be found in matter. We can formulate this conclusion thus: Just as the diversity of forms produces diversity of specific essences, the diversity of individual matter, which is intrinsically *incommunicable*, produces only diversity of individuals *within* the same species.

However, prime matter as such, as we have seen, is the principle of *indetermination*, and therefore cannot be *as such* the principle of individuation, even though this principle is found *in* it. Let us look at the individual things we see in the *material* world. What makes them concrete? What makes them to be this one here, and not that one there? Their *quantity* or bulk. It is quantity that determines matter *concretely* to be *this* matter and not *that*. Quantity is an accident

that *makes matter extended with parts outside parts*. “Extension” means that it can be traversed, one part after another. And it makes material substances distinct from one another in a concrete way. It is here, therefore,, that the principle of individuation lies: in *matter marked by quantity*.

Thus, the principle of individuation of John is to be found in the matter from which John has come, marked by the quantity that he had. This is why children resemble their parents:, because the individuality of children is determined by the concretized matter of their parents. And this is why the human soul, which is directly created by God, is different; from all other souls: because it is created *for* this body alone, God does not create all souls identical: they are all differentiated, since they are all individualized by the bodies (there is no reincarnation).

CHAPTER 8

Other Aspects of Christian Philosophy and Their Theological Relevance

a. *Metaphysics of man and sciences of man*

We can cast a metaphysical glance (through the prism of being as being) at more specific areas of reality. First, what we can call the *metaphysics of man* or, in the context of Christian philosophy, what we can call *Christian anthropology*. This is the metaphysical study of the *spiritual* operations of man: intelligence and free choice. It goes beyond the scope of the *metaphysics of nature*, which is the metaphysical study of corporeal being.

The metaphysics of man studies the spiritual operations of man as belonging to a higher order than those confined to the purely material world: understanding, loving, willing; and their objects: truth and goodness — all very much related to theology, both dogmatic and moral.

As metaphysics guides the other sciences, so the metaphysics of man has to guide the other sciences of man. There are many human sciences (they are also called *social sciences*), such as history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, legal philosophy, economics, etc. (any science where man is involved one way or another). Now, all these sciences need the orientation of the metaphysics of man, because they consider *only one aspect of man*, while metaphysics takes man as a whole, in the totality of his being. Each of those sciences is necessarily confined to its own province, and in order to keep within that province and not to step into another (in order not to jump into conclusions which are beyond its own scope), it needs the guidance of metaphysics.

Take sociology, for example. It is an *empirical* or descriptive science which tries to explain the patterns of development and behavior in human society. But it is not a *normative* science: it is not for sociology to tell man what he *should* do. It only tells us how men usually behave. It is purely *statistical*, not an “exact” science, as physics is, for instance. If a group of sociologists make a survey to find out how many women are using contraceptives, and the result shows that they are majority, this does not entitle them to conclude that since “this is the trend” it must be morally alright: by this token, all possible crimes *could* be made “permissible” and thereby legalized. Those sociologists would have stepped beyond their competence, into the territory of moral philosophy and metaphysics: a scientific and

methodological blunder.

Or take legal philosophy. If a jurist comes to the conclusion that the law must reflect the mores of the people, that laws should be adjusted to what the majority do, he is also stepping beyond the boundaries of his competence, into the sphere of ethics or metaphysical morals: if laws are at the service of man, they should help him to achieve his perfection, rather than demoralizing him by condoning his moral failures.

Or take psychology. If a psychologist observes the pattern of responses to certain stimuli, and comes to the conclusion that man has no freedom of choice, he has chosen the wrong premises by failing to study the real nature of human freedom in the metaphysics of man.

Or take economics. If an economist makes a calculation of how to apportion certain scarce resources, and comes to the conclusion that human beings have to be reduced in number, he has committed another methodological blunder by failing to understand the transcendent value of the human person, which only the metaphysics of man can show in all its depth.

b. Particular sciences are in need of metaphysics

Since metaphysics studies man as a whole, it is above all those other sciences of man and does not depend on them. They may change and progress, in fact they are always changing, but this does not affect metaphysics in any way whatsoever. It is not true that the reason why sciences have advanced so much in the last few centuries is *because* they separated themselves from metaphysics. Metaphysics is absolutely independent from all those sciences: it looks at man as he is in himself, in his total being, not from this or that point of view, at this time or in that place, but in his human *nature*.

For example, the physics that St. Thomas was acquainted with in the 13th century is now largely obsolete, but this does not affect his metaphysical arguments and insights at all. The reason why sciences have progressed since then is simply that they have *specialized* and concentrated on their own field. Their link with metaphysics remains the same, and metaphysics, on the other hand, is independent from them. They continue to need the guidance of metaphysics so as not to step beyond the boundaries of their own specialty.

So, while these *particular* sciences are by themselves incapable of reaching God, since they are confined to just one section of reality, metaphysics, as we have seen, deals with God directly. That is why it is used by supernatural theology to explain reality.

If a scientist thinks that the only way to know reality is his own science, he may come to the conclusion (since no *particular* science

leads to God by itself) that there is no God. But this is an error, since a particular science does not know reality *as a whole*. Reality as a whole is the study of metaphysics. And then, on top of metaphysics, our *faith* enlightens us regarding reality: God and the eternal destiny of man.

c. Theological relevance of the metaphysics of nature

We can briefly state that the metaphysics of nature or of the corporeal world, as distinct from the sciences of nature (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) has also theological importance and relevance.

First, because it casts light on the mystery of *transubstantiation* — the Eucharist — through the doctrine of substance and accidents as well as on some supernatural facts such as miracles.

It also dispels certain obscurities in the relationship of faith and science. Since the level of the particular sciences cannot reach God, as we have seen, there might be some sort of conflict for scientists. But the metaphysics of nature shows that there is no gap between the material universe and God: this metaphysical knowledge, different from that of the sciences, does link up with God while remaining within the sphere of “nature”, and therefore constitutes the bridge between the sciences and the faith.

d. Metaphysics and logic

Let us recall what was said above about the three levels of metaphysics, moral philosophy and logic ([ch. 6, c](#)). Man reaches the truth, the intelligible truth, from one stage of knowledge to another. It is of the nature of man to learn step by step. This is called *discursive* or rational knowledge. “Discourse” means originally “walking through a way”. Although man’s initial perceptions, both sensible and intellectual, are intuitive, his normal way of acquiring knowledge is by the rational process of deducing new truths from truths already known, step by step. This process of reasoning is studied by logic, the science of *human* thinking, not of Chinese or German thinking, of Western or Eastern thinking, but of human thinking common to all cultures and races: just because Aristotle happened to be the greatest logician, we should not regard logic as a “Greek phenomenon alien to, say, Asian culture”.

Now, we have to distinguish the *art* of logic from the *science* of logic. The former consists in using the mind correctly: how to reason properly. Art is an activity: making things. Let us recall ([ch. 6, c](#)) the two aspects of the intelligence: the receptive and the active or

practical; the latter corresponds to art, and the former to science. Logic is first of all an art, in the sense that we reason in order to acquire knowledge. But it is also a science which can be studied in itself.

And what is the object of this *science of logic*? Not reality as such, because this is the object of metaphysics, but *the relations that beings have precisely in the human mind*. Logic studies mental relations, not real relations. The object of logic is the very act of reason, not the reality outside the mind. And this is why, as we said, logic is so difficult: it requires a tremendous effort of reflection.

The science of logic already presupposes the knowledge of things. That is why it is better to study logic *after* having studied other sciences and metaphysics: in this way we can reflect upon the knowledge we have already acquired.

Man has an uncanny tendency to confuse the order of logic with the order of metaphysics, the order of ideas with the order of real things. For example, he can easily substantialize accidents in his thinking (like turning a concrete noun like “fertile” into an abstract noun like “fertility”, and thinking of the latter as if it were a substance), with the resulting confusion of ideas with reality, because accidents can only exist by themselves as concepts in the mind, not as realities in themselves: only substances exist and act by themselves. One cannot say, for instance, that “love is what brings about marriage”, because love is only an accident, the activity of a human person: it is the persons that bring about the marriage through a conscious and deliberate mutual acceptance.

To avoid this frequent confusion, it is important to notice that logic depends on metaphysics, not the other way round. Modern philosophy has done the opposite: by shifting away from God to man, it has made logic prior to metaphysics. As a result, it has split up into many systems all of them different, saying different things and striving to outshout one another. Each of them is the *mental* construction of someone eager to say the last word and make everybody accept his own so- called world-view. And this trend becomes alarming when this imposition is backed up by political force, as it happens with Marxism.

Metaphysics is prior to logic, as reality is prior to ideas. Logic is extremely useful when we study it in the right way and at the right time, i.e. after metaphysics. And then we learn the discipline of never confusing our concepts with reality as such. We realize that our concepts depend on reality all the time, and we should not *substantialize* them. We do not create substances; we only create concepts. But these concepts are useful to the extent that they are *true*, i.e. that they conform with reality, because truth (*logical* truth) is the agreement of the mind with reality.

CHAPTER 13

Substance and Accidents

a. The evidence of change and the truth about being

Metaphysics starts by looking at the *sensible world*, as we said above. We call this sensible world “nature” or the world of nature. This nature appears to us as the world of change and multiplicity. This change and multiplicity cause in our mind a state of wonder which leads it to a first division of being: “what changes” and the “change itself”, namely the substance and the accidents. By analyzing change, we come to understand something which is more perfect than change, something stable and permanent. We cannot have change unless *something* changes: *that* “something” is therefore what underlies the changes.

If there is nothing permanent, nothing can be *known*, because “to know” is precisely to grasp what is permanent. In fact, this is what led Plato to say that we cannot have knowledge about the sensible world. He agreed that everything is changing in the sensible world, and thus concluded that we cannot have knowledge, i.e. *scientific* knowledge, about that world: all we can have, he maintained, is *opinion*, but not real knowledge or science (*episteme*).

Aristotle, on the other hand, reached the *substance*, and thus he concluded that we *can* have real knowledge or science about the sensible world, since there is a permanent element in it: this justifies the study of all the *natural sciences*. What would be the point of studying physics, chemistry, biology, etc. if “everything is changing”? But in fact, there *is* a permanent element. That is why we can have real knowledge about nature. No science of nature would have developed had this point not been clearly settled by Aristotle *in metaphysics*.

b. The notion of being applies primarily to substance

We already defined substance as *what exists or is by itself and in itself*. It is, therefore, that to which *ens* applies primarily. We also mentioned that being is analogical: it applies partly in the same sense and partly in a different sense. To substance, it applies strictly, and to accidents broadly.

A substance can be described as

(i) *a unity of being in multiplicity*: we see, for example, *many* men, but discover that each man is *one* being, with a perfect unity, and we call this unity in multiplicity substance;

(ii) *permanence in changes*: what does not change under the changes;

(iii) *the subsistence* of a nucleus or core of being on which or in which all other things exist.

This notion of substance has a great importance in theology. More specifically, “person” is an *individual substance of a rational nature*, or in other words, a being that exists by itself with a rational nature. This has utmost importance for the study of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, of the Incarnation and Redemption.

A very special case in this respect is the mystery of the Eucharist, where we say that the “substance” of the bread is entirely replaced by the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ; but the “accidents” of the bread remain, such as its quantity, taste, smell and color. And this change or conversion is called by the Church *transubstantiation*. Some modern theologians have tried to replace the concept of transubstantiation on the grounds of being “obsolete”, but the concept of substance is not subject to history or to culture, since it is a most simple and elementary concept which any human being makes in contact with reality anywhere and at any time. It is neither Greek, nor Latin, nor medieval, but a plain and ordinary notion that anybody forms when looking at the changing reality. Influenced by historicism, these modern theologies try to substitute another concept for that of transubstantiation using a philosophy which is *man-centered*, rather than *being-centered*.

They say that the change which takes place in the Eucharist is a change of “purpose”, that is to say, that the purpose of the bread and wine is replaced by the purpose of “making the believer aware” of the presence of Christ; and thus they call this change *transfinalization*. Others speak of a change of “meaning”, so that what changes after the words of consecration is the meaning of the bread and wine, not its “physical reality”, and so they call it *transignification*. It is clear that neither of these explanations agree with the dogma of the Eucharist, as Pope Paul VI pointed out in his Encyclical *Mysterium fidei* of 1965.

We must stress the point that substance is not an obsolete concept. It is only by perverting philosophy, making it man- centered rather than being-centered, that we can come to dismiss the concept of substance as “out of date”. We cannot lose our contact with common sense, the plain reality that we see with our eyes — that *is* reality — and we depend entirely on reality for all our knowledge. What happens with modern man is that sometimes he wants to be the

creator of reality, instead of its disciple. That is why he wants to *remake* everything, to re-think everything in terms of its relevance to man, of what it means *to man*.

There are four insights which show the intimate reality of substance:

(i) that it is the subject or holder of the accidents (this is the meaning of *sub-stare*: “to stand under”);

(ii) that it is what subsists, i.e. what exists by itself, on which everything else is based: in a being, what subsists is the substance, and all other aspects (accidents) are based on the substance;

(iii) that it has the act of being *in itself*, and not in another;

(iv) that it is what fully fulfills the notion of *ens* (what has *esse*).

c. Accidents: secondary manners of being

We say that accidents are *secondary* manners of being, existing in the substance, because they cannot be “primary”: as soon as we perceive them we realize that there must be something that holds them. They can be described as

(i) determinations of *ens* which appear *multiplied* in a subject, e.g. in a subject such as a dog we find *many* secondary determinations, such as size, weight, color, etc.;

(ii) *changeable* determinations of a *permanent* subject;

(iii) *derived* or secondary determinations of a primary and *principal* subject.

Therefore, the manner of being of the accidents is secondary, since they need a substance in order to be. They can be called beings *of being* (*entis* in Latin), while the substance is called simply being (*ens*). The accidents, always many, are beings of being (*entia entis*); it belongs to them *to be in another* and not in themselves; and they are *really* distinct from their subject.

Now, created substances are limited and imperfect, since their act of being is limited by their manner of being. Therefore, they need to be perfected by *accidental forms*.

Now, as for their classification, the simplest and most convenient way to divide the accidents is by looking at the way they are applied or *predicated*. Predication is the act of affirming or denying one concept of another. It is what we do in a *judgment* or proposition, such as “John is an Asian”. What we affirm or deny is the *predicate*; that of which we affirm it or deny it is called the *subject*. The accidents, by the manner in which they are predicated, can be classified or

divided as follows (while the substance corresponds to the subject, rather than to the predicates):

When we predicate something which is not of the substance of the subject but is intrinsically joined to it, this may happen in three ways: (1) through the matter, and this is the accident of *quantity*; (2) through the form, and this is *quality*; (3) with regard to something else, and this is *relation*.

And when we predicate something extrinsic to the substance, this may happen again in several ways: (4) the act of causing efficiently, and this is *action*; (5) the correlative of action, which is *passivity*; (6) in relation to other bodies, *place*; (7) in relation to succession, *time*; (8) in relation to itself, in the disposition or arrangement of its parts, *posture*; (9) as to the cover which beings put on, which somehow becomes part of themselves (such as hides, furs, clothes), *possession*.

Therefore, there are ten *categories* of being: the substance and the nine accidents. "Category" (Greek) means precisely that: *predicate*, and that's why those ten categories are also called *predicaments*. We can classify predicates ultimately into ten ultimate kinds (kind = type = genus; plural: genera), which are the supreme *genera* or supreme categories of being classified according to the manners of predication. Examples of each of them:

- (1) John is a man (substance).
- (2) John weighs 200 pounds (quantity).
- (3) John is clever (quality).
- (4) John is Peter's brother (relation).
- (5) John is speaking (action).
- (6) John is loved (passivity).
- (7) John is behind the bench (place).
- (8) John came yesterday (time).
- (9) John is sitting down (posture).
- (10) John is wearing black shoes (possession).

d. Substance and accidents related in three ways

There is a threefold relationship of substance to accidents:

(i) substance is the *subject* of the accidents, "subject" meaning here the holder or bearer, what underlies, and it indicates the metaphysical dependence of accidents on substance;

(ii) substance is to accident what potency is to act, because the accidents perfect the substance;

(iii) substance is to accident what cause is to effect: the

accidents come into being *because* of the substance.

The accident, therefore, is not something that “conceals” the substance but *reveals* it (cf. [ch. 9, c](#)) and is founded on the substance. As we have seen, some modern philosophies have criticized the concept of substance, thus leading some modern theologies to try to scrap that concept. But the basis of this criticism has often been that they were trying to *imagine* the substance, without realizing that it is not a sensible image, but a purely intelligible concept, a transensible object. To try to use the senses in order to see the substance is like trying to smell with one's ears or to measure the weight of an animal with a thermometer. The accidents are not the “envelope” or outer wrapping of the substance, but precisely what *reveals* the substance *to our intelligence*.

*e. The “**in-esse**” of the accidents*

The *esse* of the accidents is to be understood in a broad sense, because *esse* (to be) strictly belongs only to the substance. We said that the accidents are “of the substance”. The *esse* of the accidents consists in *in-esse* (to be in). If we call the accidents beings, therefore, it is not because they *are* by themselves, but because *through them* something *is*, namely the substance. For example, through the accident of wisdom (quality) John is said to be wise: his wisdom is *in* him, but it is he who is a being; it is the substance that is in act and that acts.

Earlier, we mentioned the Eucharist. Now let us clarify that after the consecration the accidents of the bread and wine remain *without a subject*, since they do not inhere in the substance of Christ: it is God who, in His omnipotence, preserves them in being without a subject, but they are there to cover a mystery. This is why in the catechism we say that when we break a consecrated host we are not breaking the Body of Christ, but an accident of bread (quantity), which is held in being by the omnipotence of God.

f. Particular importance of relation

Relation is especially relevant in theology due to the fact of the existence of relations within the Blessed Trinity: the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. These relations, however, are not accidents, since they are subsistent Persons, but they are nevertheless relations. “Relation”,

being one of the ultimate categories of being, cannot be defined, since these categories are the most general classifications that can be found in a particular line. All we can do, therefore, is to *describe* more or less what they *do to* the substance.

Now, what does relation do to the substance? It *refers* the substance to something else: it is an *ordination* or reference to another. This “referring to” is precisely what distinguishes relation from substance, quantity, quality, etc. And there are two types of relation: (i) *real*, i.e. between realities, actual things; and (ii) *logical*, i.e. between concepts in the mind.

What is the ultimate essence of relation? (this is a very important question in the context of the Blessed Trinity) There are two elements in it: (a) *esse ad* = “to be in relation to”; (b) *esse in* = “to be in”. The latter is common to all accidents, and therefore cannot be the *distinctive* mark of relation: that leaves (a) as the essential element of relation. What is common to all accidents is that they *exist in* the substance, but no accident has *esse ad* except relation. There may be relations, therefore, which have no *esse in* but only *esse ad*, and which consequently are not accidents but *subsistent* relations: these are the relations within the Blessed Trinity, because in God there can be no accidents, since the accidents *perfect* the substance and God is the fulness of being.

On the other hand, the relation of the creature to God *is* an accident, although a *necessary* accident: *every* creature has it, since it has received being *from* God. As we already said, the fact that accidents are secondary or derived does not mean that they may not be necessary (intelligence is of the essence of man, although it is an accident: it exists *in* man). When we talk about “essential” and “accidental”, we are talking about concepts, but *in reality* there are only substances and accidents, not essences and accidents, and some *real* accidents are necessary or essential to the substance. This is the case of the relationship of the creature to the Creator: *religion*, the highest manifestation of intelligence, is precisely the recognition and living experience of this relationship by the intelligent creature on behalf of the entire created universe. (Cf. [ch. 6, c](#)).

CHAPTER 9

The Method of Metaphysics

a. Philosophy begins with wonder

What is the *method* of metaphysics? The word “method” comes from the Greek *methódos*, which means “the way across”. Applied to science, it means *the way followed by the science in order to reach its object*. And how does metaphysics reach its object?

The beginning of philosophy, as Aristotle pointed out, is *wonder*. Wonder is what sets us on the pursuit of wisdom when we start asking questions pointing to causes: why this? wherefrom? whereto? and so forth (cf. ch. 6, c). This is the sense of wonder. Instead of just taking things for granted and going on living, like animals and plants, man wonders why, he thinks, and this is the beginning of philosophy.

This is how philosophy has started everywhere. Men see certain things happening around them, like plants growing, rain falling, the sun rising... and they begin to wonder about the *causes* of these things. These are all *effects*, but every effect (*effectum* = thing made) implies a cause: nothing can *come to be* unless something else brings it into being. This particular moving from effect to cause, and from cause to effect, is typical of the intelligence, as distinct from the senses. The senses observe and perceive, but they don't inquire about the cause. It is the intelligence that inquires, “if this is an effect, what is the cause?” And then, if it has found the cause, it proceeds to look at the way the cause brings about the effect, and in this way it constructs science and philosophy.

This sense of wonder leads man to God as first and ultimate cause. This is the characteristic of intelligence: the wisdom that looks for causes, and then looks at the way the cause produces the effect, and how the effect is produced by the cause, until it reaches a permanent knowledge, a necessary knowledge, and that is what science is. Science seeks to account for *necessary* causes, not just accidental causes. It is not scientific to say that *this* has been produced by *that*: the scientist has to *prove* that *this* cause has produced *this* effect necessarily, i.e. that it is the nature of this cause to produce this effect in *this* way. Science aims at what is permanent in reality, what is necessary and always true, as distinct from what is only an isolated case, which may or may not happen that way, as we saw in ch. 6, e.

b. Science as the search for the universal and necessary

A common trait of all sciences is that they look for what is universal and necessary within what is particular and contingent. If we want, for example, to grow certain trees, we will have to consult the corresponding science as to the conditions and causes involved *always and everywhere* in the growing of such trees. This is what “universal” means: that it is valid in every case. And this is the characteristic of science: to *abstract* the universal from the particular.

This process whereby from particular cases we come to the universal is called *induction*. It is an intuitive, *not deductive* process (see ch. 8, d), whereby the intelligence, piercing through sense experience, grabs hold of what is *essential*, sorting it out of what is only incidental. The process of induction is thus basically the same as that of abstraction, the difference being that while the latter aims at the *concept* (first operation of the mind), the former aims at the *judgment* (second operation of the mind). But in both cases, what is universal and necessary is, so to speak, extracted from what is particular and contingent. For example, the intelligence (a) *abstracts* the concept of animal from all particular and contingent animals, and (b) *induces* that “every animal has sensitivity” from all particular cases of animals with sensitivity directly observed.

And it cannot be asked that the mind should “prove” such inductions and abstractions, since they are intuitive, i.e. in direct contact with the object, and only what is not directly observable is in need of proof, i.e. of rational argumentation and deduction.

c. Intelligence and senses

Our intelligence acquires science from sensible images. Science is a combined effort of senses and intelligence. The senses gather data, and then the intelligence grasps the *being*, the essence, from what is non-essential or merely incidental. It is not of the essence of man, for instance, to be mongoloid or caucasian, to be black or white, but it is essential in him to be intelligent and free. This is how the intelligence acquires science.

The process goes like this: (i) *sensations*; (ii) from all the sensations a *memory*; (iii) all the memories together form an *experience*; (iv) from many experiences the intelligence forms a *universal principle* (concept or statement); and (v) from this universal principle the mind proceeds to *draw conclusions*. This is the *scientific method* or process: from (i) to (iv) induction and abstraction; and (v) deduction or reasoning.

The intellectual knowledge comes from the senses. We always start with our senses, but in the things perceived by the senses the intelligence *knows many things which the senses cannot perceive*. Take, for instance, motion, and the regularity of motion that the intelligence can even measure mathematically. This is not a matter of the senses. Naturally the motion is perceived through the senses, but the *concept* of motion and the *measurement* of motion are purely *intelligible*. The senses grasp things in their external *accidents*: color, taste, motion, size, weight, smell. But the intelligence penetrates into the *being* of things, not only into the being of the substance, but into the being of the accidents.

The intelligence reaches the *essence*, which is purely intelligible, and is capable of *abstracting* that essence from the material individual conditions of the thing. It can reach, say, the concept of heat-wave: an abstraction from the heat-waves that have been experienced. Or take the concept of mammal: the intelligence forms it as a concept out of the sensible experience of many individual dogs, cats, elephants, etc., and it gathers into it all that is essential in those animals and common to all of them.

The intelligence grasps the essence, and considers it in itself, as distinct from the individuating conditions which are *incidental*, not essential. “Incidental” is whatever does not belong to the essence of the thing. Of course, it is *accidental* also; but there are certain accidents which belong to the essence of the thing (cf. ch. 7, b). Every incidental thing is an accident, but not every accident is incidental. “Essential” is ; not equivalent to “substantial”. Something may be accidental to the substance, as *thinking* is accidental to the substance of man (it *exists in* him), but essential to the being itself, as thinking is not incidental to his essence.

What the intelligence does, we were saying, is to penetrate through those external accidents and grasp what is essential in the thing. So that the accidents, contrary to what some wrong philosophies have claimed, *do not conceal* the substance but *reveal* it (make it known). It is through the accidents that we get to know the substance and the essence. These wrong philosophies for which the accidents “conceal” the substance, have thereby misunderstood the substance. Some of them, for example, despise the knowledge of accidents falling into a rationalistic conceptualism that neglects sense verification, while others deny the existence of substance saying that all we can see is accidents and there is nothing beyond them.

d. Intellectual and sensible certainty

Of what are we more sure, of what we see through our senses or of what we understand through our intelligence? Of what are we more certain: “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” or “this table is brown”?

By the light of the intelligence we acquire a certainty about things which cannot be perceived through the senses, although they can be proved. Our certainty is then based not on sensible evidence but on rational proof or demonstration. On the other hand, through the senses we acquire a certainty which can be verified through the senses. We may make a statement which we can prove by appealing to the senses, like saying that “it is cold outside”. Or we may make a statement which we cannot at all check with the senses, although we can prove with our reason, like “the human soul is immortal”. We have then two types of certainties: intellectual and sensible.

Which of the two is the stronger? The sensible one is what we may call *experimental* certainty, and may be obtained also after a rational proof, so that in the end it is both intellectual and sensible. Three certainties are possible then: (i) only sensible; (ii) only intelligible; (iii) intelligible, and then sensible.

Let us look at metaphysics. What sort of certainty is attained by it? The starting point of metaphysics is the sensible world, as we have seen. But starting from there, it reaches an intellectual certainty. It *begins* at the level of the senses but rises to the level of the intelligence. For example, when it considers God or the human soul, these objects of knowledge are entirely beyond the sensible world, and so are realities like substance and accidents *in* the sensible world also. If I look at a cat in front of me, I see and smell and touch the cat, but metaphysics says “this is a substance” and “this smell is an accident”. Neither the substance nor the accident are sensible *per se*. Metaphysics begins in the senses and rises to the purely intelligible.

What fits the human intelligence is neither the purely sensible nor the purely intelligible. What is purely sensible is very hard for man to understand *as* sensible. For example, “what is this table made of?” “of wood”. When I say “wood” I’m already using a *concept*, which is *intelligible*, beyond the *sensible* qualities of the wood. And what is “wood”? A combination of certain chemical substances, such as this and this... So, I’m using *concepts* all the time, and departing from the sensible as such. The moment I want to understand what is sensible as such I have to introduce intelligible concepts. We do understand sensible realities (otherwise we could not speak about them), but it is very hard to do so.

What is purely intelligible is also very hard for us to grasp, like God or the human soul. Why this?

We find ourselves at home, so to speak (at least in this life, when we are still in the body), with a *sensible world understood*

intelligibly. That seems to be our natural environment. This is due, as we shall see, to the *composition* of man: his spiritual side is geared to the intelligible, and his material side to the sensible. But man is neither purely material nor purely spiritual, and that's why he finds himself not at ease with the purely spiritual or with the purely sensible. This is where we find ourselves at home: in what is sensible but can be understood or conceptualized.

Some things are *below* our understanding, others are *above* it: the latter is the purely spiritual, the former is the purely sensible.

In looking at sensible things, the intelligence distinguishes between substance and accidents: these are purely intelligible concepts, impossible to sense or imagine, although they are very clear in our intelligence. Take for example the concept of mammal. We cannot *imagine* a mammal as such: we can only imagine a *particular* mammal, such as a dog or a cat. It is an abstraction that we cannot imagine, although we can very clearly *conceive*. The same thing happens with other abstractions like "weapon", "vehicle", "furniture", etc. *Concept* is the product of the intelligence; *image* is the product of the senses.

e. Intelligence and imagination

In metaphysics we try to make more precise the concepts of substance and accident, and so we feel the difficulty of having to dispense with the imagination. We find this very difficult, because, as we said, what is natural for us is to think along the sensible level with concepts. Thus, we may confuse the intelligence with the imagination, and say that we don't understand something when in fact we cannot *imagine* it.

In metaphysical knowledge, we don't have sensible evidence but only intellectual evidence. Is "substance" something evident? Intellectually, yes, but not sensibly. The fact that the imagination cannot reach it does not mean that we cannot understand it. Progress in this type of intellectual knowledge is slow, because we find it hard to move along without the imagination. It requires patience and humility: being satisfied with the light that we can reach at any stage without expecting too much, and always hoping that we will see more light in the next step.

This is specially true when studying theology. There we handle concepts like person, cause, subsistence, nature, accidents, form and so forth, and we have to get accustomed to handle them with all the metaphysical density of their meaning. Metaphysics is indeed laborious. And in order to always penetrate deeper and deeper into the

meaning of those concepts we need to go back again and again to the *sensible* experiences wherefrom we got them, as we shall see in the metaphysics of man below.

Therefore, the study of metaphysics requires the disciplining of the imagination. It's not a matter of suppressing it, but of controlling and mastering it. To the extent that the world drifts away from religious faith, metaphysics also declines, because when the supernatural life is abandoned, man tends to become like an animal. Religion lifts man up towards the spiritual, towards intellectual and responsible activity, towards what is most human and least animal. If he abandons the supernatural life, he falls back into his animality, and then the imagination takes over, because it is a sensible faculty which we have in common with animals: it is the inner sense life, which animals also have, in addition to the external sense life of seeing and touching and so forth (see below, metaphysics of man).

CHAPTER 19

Transcendental Properties of Being

a. Predicamental classification of essences and transcendental vision of being

As explained in [ch. 16](#), “transcendental” is what refers to *esse* or to *ens* as the subject of *esse*. On the other hand, “predicamental” is the level of the essence: this is where we distinguish between matter and form (matter and form make up the essence). On this level, we classify beings into ten categories or predicaments, which are specifications of the essence (cf. [ch. 13, c](#)).

Could we also classify beings on the transcendental level? No, because this level *transcends* all classifications: *ens* is predicated of the substance primarily, but also of the accidents; therefore it cannot be classified into any category, since it is not *exclusive* of any of them. However, there is something that the intelligence does in this case, namely to perceive that in every *ens*, not as essence but as *ens*, there are some *properties* which follow necessarily (“property” is a predicate which follows from the essence of the subject, like “social” in relation to “man”). (See [ch. 7, e](#))

b. Metaphysical discovery of the transcendentals

These properties are called transcendental because they belong to *ens* precisely as *ens* (subject of *esse*). How do we discover them? By simple experience. We look at *things* (*res* in

Latin, hence “reality”), and notice that they all exist: they are *beings* (*ens*: plural *entia*). And immediately we notice that every being excludes all other beings: it is only *one* (*unum*). Then, by making statements about them agreeing with them or not, we call them *true* (*verum*). And by perceiving them as objects of tendencies or desires for perfection we call them good (*bonum*).

These properties (one, true, good) are found in every thing as being, in everything in so far as it *is*, not in so far as it is a table or a chair, an animal or a plant, but in so far as it *is*. And when we see those three properties together shining in a being, we call it *beautiful* (*pulchrum*): a property derived from the other three. Let us now take a closer look at these transcendental properties, as they reveal the richness of *ens*.

c. The unity of being

Unity of being is the *negation of division* that we find in things: each reality, to the extent that it keeps its being, keeps its unity. Fidelity to one's being is the token of unity, and it requires more strength than the opposite process of disintegration. The unity of Christ's Church is an example of this fidelity.

The greatest unity or negation of division belongs to the most simple being (one with no parts whatsoever). This is the *unity of simplicity*: the unity of God. And as for composite beings, they possess their being to the extent that their parts are united: this is the *unity of composition*.

Within the unity of composition, then, there are various degrees: the unity of composition of a table is less than that of a river, which is less than that of a flower, which is less than that of an animal; the unity of an army is less than that of a family, which is less than that of a man, and so forth. Unity has degrees, like being. Just as being is participated, and so it has degrees of perfection, so is unity, because it is precisely a property of being as being.

The greatest unity is that of God; then, that of spiritual substances; then, that of non-spiritual substances; and finally, that of aggregates of substances put together either by nature, like a cloud or a mountain, or by man, like a house or a chair, or a family or an army.

d. The truth of being

When our statements about reality agree with reality we call them true; otherwise we call them false. Reality (being) is therefore the point of reference for our minds. "Truth" is in the mind, because when we affirm or deny (make statements), it is our mind that does so. But it is in the mind as the *effect of reality*: reality *causes* the truth in the mind. In this sense, we can identify being and truth: we call "being" *true* as related to mind.

Every being can be known in so far as it is *in act*: the less actual (and more potential) it is, the less knowable it is. Truth is founded upon being, not vice versa: it is a metaphysical error to reduce the being of things to their being-known. There is more in things that can meet the eye, so to speak. The man-centeredness of modern philosophy tends to make this reduction.

As against this man-centeredness (only what is relevant to man has meaning and truly exists), the metaphysics of *esse* affirms that

being is primary, and that the *human* mind has to adjust itself to being, not the other way around: truth follows from, and depends on being. Only the divine mind knows everything.

Now, if truth is founded on being, and being or *ens* is by virtue of the act of being, truth is founded more on the *esse* than on the essence of things. The *esse* or act of being is like the light of things which enlightens the observer, the light of intelligibility (see [ch. 12, c](#)).

Beings do not have *esse* by themselves, but only by participation. Likewise, they are true also to the extent that they participate of the principle of all perfections, which is *esse*: they are all the more true, the more *esse* they have. Thus, God *is* the Truth, totally full of light and perfectly known to Himself, and the cause of all other truths (that's why lying is intrinsically evil).

The divine mind is the *cause*, the *rule* and the *measure* of all things: things are ultimately true as related to the divine mind, and *they* are the cause of truth in the human mind. When the human mind opens itself to reality, it opens itself to God; when it turns itself inwardly and makes itself its own end, God becomes all the less intelligible.

e. The goodness of being

“Good” can be described by its effect, as St. Thomas does, following Aristotle: good is *what all things desire (quod omnia appetunt)*. To the extent that things tend to their perfection, we call them good: when they fulfill their end or purpose. “Good” is not the same as “desire”: it is the *object* of desire. “Good” is the *end* to which an *agent* tends by its operation: it is “being” considered in its end, as finished (*finis* = end), completed, fulfilled. Goodness is the perfection of *being*. This is why there are degrees of goodness, just as there are degrees of truth, unity and being: there is “good”, “better” and “best”.

Therefore, goodness is founded on being, springs from it and reverts to it, because it makes being more being. This is what is meant by *bonum diffusivum sui* (good is self-expansive) as applied to God's goodness: it overflows out of His abundance. Goodness tends to communication.

Since *esse* is, therefore, the foundation of goodness, only God is good by essence, while creatures are good only by participation. The goodness which in God is absolutely simple, in creatures it is multiplied and divided. This is why St. Thomas says that the *entire* universe represents the goodness of God better than a single creature.

f. The common good: law and justice

A very important distinction is that between *absolute good* and *good of order*. God is *esse* itself, and therefore He is the absolute good, and the last end of everything. On the other hand, created good needs to be perfected by means of operation, which must be *ordered to the end* of this created good (this is particularly relevant for the morality of human acts, i.e. their relationship to the last end of man, as we shall see in ethics). There is a *universal order* whereby all things are directed towards their perfection and thereby to God: this good of the universe is called *good of order*.

All created beings in so far as they *actually* are participate in that good of order of the universe, in the sense that God is the end of all things and the point of reference for the order of the universe. God is called the *common good*, because He is the good of *all things*. Specifically, God is the *common good of human society*, and since the common good of society is the good of *every man* (namely, God), there is no conflict between the individual good and the common good: *it is only if the individual chooses himself as his last end that the conflict arises*.

We can make a distinction here between (i) common good *transcendent* to the world, which is God, and (ii) common good *immanent* to the world, which is the good of order, and in society the good of society, which consists in a social organization such that every person in it is in a position to attain to God, his last end.

Law is the basis of the order of society: the purpose of law is *to direct men to their common good*. Without a law, “might is right”: the tyrant will prevail. That is why, as a manifestation of social love, a juridical mentality must be fostered, i.e. a sense of justice. (See [ch. 43, a](#))

Justice is that state of law whereby things are organized in a good order: all the rights and duties are clearly recognized and facilitated. The absence of law gives rise to tyrannies, strife and wars. And there can be no law if it is not founded on the sovereignty of God. These are the bases of *social ethics*. They are metaphysical: based on the analysis of *being*, and of the good (see Ethics).

g. Evil as the absence of good

The word “bad” is as common as the word “good”. When children learn the meaning of good and bad, they immediately classify all things into good and bad. But as we begin to look into being, we see that the matter is not as black and white as all that. There are certain realities that more or less everybody agrees are bad, such as

sickness, pain, anguish, sorrow, death... Why do we call them bad? Because they are not good. We would not be able to call them bad if we didn't know what good is. Evil is the *absence of good*: it cannot be defined without good, because evil is not a substance (it cannot exist *by itself*).

A being is good to the extent that it *is*, as we said: evil is precisely the absence of something good in the substance. Therefore, in reality it can only be an adjective, never a noun. On the other hand, "good" can be a noun: the good, or goodness, which is God, the fulness of being. Any evil at all has to be *in* the good always: it is an accident. It is like a good which is not as good as it *should* be. No matter how bad a thing is, there is always good in it. It is better to be *with suffering* than not to be at all. This is sometimes forgotten by those with a pessimistic view of the world, but it is obvious if we think of what *to be* means.

Therefore, the way to counteract evil is by means of good. If we fight evil with evil, we only make it worse. The way to overcome evil is with good, by making things better, rather than destroying them. All the disorders of society are the result of these failures to understand reality.

This brings us to the real evil, which is not so much what one might call *physical* evil, but rather *moral* evil. A physical evil is the absence of a physical good. It can be remedied, but strictly speaking we cannot really call this evil necessarily evil, because we may not know the ultimate reason why it exists. For all we know, it may turn out for the good in the end. That someone is blind, for example, is a physical evil, but it may be morally very good for him. Physical evils are relative.

Strictly speaking, what is really evil is the *moral* evil, i.e. the absence of a moral good in so far as it is the responsibility of man, because in this case we do know the cause of it: the free will of man, or rather man with his freedom. This is the real evil: that man should turn away from his last end by disobeying the law that directs him thereto. And this violation of the moral law is called *sin*. And since man does this knowingly and willingly, with full responsibility, *as a cause*, this *is* an evil without any further qualifications (while, on the other hand, if we say for instance that sickness is evil, it is so with qualifications).

h. The beauty of being

We said that beauty is a combination of unity, truth and good. Beauty strikes us first in the objects we *see* or *hear*, i.e.

in what we perceive through the superior senses of sight and hearing. These senses can reach much farther than smell taste and touch; they can take in more; they can put us in contact with *being* much more comprehensively. But if we compare the range of the intelligence with that of the senses, the latter are nothing in comparison. With the intelligence we can reach infinity, not with the senses. Beauty is therefore intimately related to *being*, because it is through the senses *that reach farther* that we get the experience of beauty (aesthetic experience). This experience or feeling is *good*, because it pleases the senses, but it is also *true*, since it is based on the perfection of being as understood by the intelligence: what is false is necessarily ugly and bad.

What makes a thing really beautiful, pleasing to the senses? *Certain qualities that only the intelligence can perceive.* Animals have no sense of beauty. Although it comes through the eyes and through the ears, it is based on the *being* of the object: only the intelligence can recognize it. These qualities discovered by the intelligence are the following:

(i) That there is *harmony* among the parts of the object. "Harmony" is *unity in diversity*: order and arrangement in relation to an end (harmonious sights and harmonious sounds).

(ii) *Completeness* or perfection of being: only the intelligence perceives the missing parts that ought to be there, and whose absence makes the object ugly.

(iii) *Brightness* or splendor of intelligibility: fittingness to the knowing faculty which is thus delighted with the experience.

The intelligence discovers these qualities first in sensible objects, because human knowledge begins on that level; but it goes on to discover them also in spiritual realities, which can be neither seen nor heard. The intelligence can indeed discover the greatest of all beauty: the fullness of being which is God. In God (i) there is the highest *harmony*: the greatest unity of being with the greatest diversity of perfections; (ii) the greatest *completeness* of being: fullness of being, pure act of being; and (iii) the greatest *brightness* of intelligibility as the pure actuality of being: the more something *is*, the more intelligible it is. God possesses these three qualities of beauty in an infinite degree, to the extent of dazzling and ravishing the human intelligence, whose capacity to understand depends on the intensity of love: *oculus meus, amor meus* (my love is my eye), says St. Thomas.

CHAPTER 16

The Act of Being and the Essence

a. Ultimate structure of the finite subsistent

There is a radical difference between the Creator and the creature, as we have seen: the *real* composition of essence and the act of being in the creature. This point is entirely original to the metaphysics of St. Thomas, along with the doctrine of participation. In fact, these two points are basic in his metaphysics.

After St. Thomas, some Scholastics fell under the influence of *nominalism*, according to which the *only* reality of concepts is that they are “names”: they have no other reality than *to be names*. Consequently, they understood *esse* as identical with *real* essence or with existence, and so, for them there was no *real* distinction of essence and *esse* in creatures, so that the difference between God and creatures would only be a difference of degree, not of kind.

We have shown (ch. 12), however, that *esse* should not be identified with existence. St. Thomas showed the *real* composition of essence and the act of being in creatures in various ways. The most important argument is from the fact of *participation*. He says that a thing is predicated (cf. ch. 13, c) of another in two ways: (i) essentially; (ii) by participation. For example, in “John is a man”, is the whole essence of John identical with the essence of man? No: this is a case of participation, since John only participates or partakes of the essence of man; he is not the only one who has the essence of man. On the other hand, in “a triangle is a three-sided figure”, is there anything outside the triangle that is a three-sided figure? No. So here the predicate applies essentially: there is no participation in this case.

b. Predicamental and transcendental participation

Something can be participated, or partaken of, or shared in two ways:

(i) As something belonging to the substance of the participant. For example: “John is a man”. In this case, the individual participates of the species. The same thing happens with the species in relation to the genus (“man is an animal”): the species participates of the genus. This participation is called *predicamental*, because it occurs on the

level of essence (cf. [ch. 15, b](#)).

(ii) As something not entering into the essence of the participant: this is the participation in *esse*. For example, “John exists” or “this table exists”: both are beings. John is a being, but he is not the only one: he participates. In this case, *esse* or “to be” does not enter into the essence of the subject: when we say “John is a being”, is *being* part of the essence of John? If it were, it would be “essential” for John to be. But this is not true, of course. The essence of John is to be a rational animal, but not “to be”. So, there is a *real composition* of essence and “to be” in John (in all creatures). This participation is called *transcendental*, because it occurs on the level of *esse*, as was explained above.

This is the core of this argument of St. Thomas to show the *real composition*:

(i) That any creature is a being by participation: it only *has* being, it *is not* being.

(ii) Therefore, every creature has a division in itself between *what participates* (essence) and *what is participated* in the order of *esse*, and these two are related as potency to act.

This composition is the fundamental structure of all creatures, and so it also belongs to the spiritual substance. This has no composition of matter and form, and in this sense it is simple. On the level of the essence, the spiritual substance is simple; but on the level of *esse* (transcendental level), it is also composite, namely of essence and the act of being, potency and act. Thus, there is a clear difference between the most perfect angel and God, an infinite distance, because the distance between a *participation of being*, however rich, and the *fullness of being* is infinite.

This being by participation, which is the very essence of the creature, is what shows the reality of *causality* most clearly, i.e. that the creature is the effect of a cause. And it also shows the origin of the creature. St. Thomas used this insight many times in connection with very many topics, and found it very illuminating. It is the central point of his personal synthesis of Aristotle and Plato. From Aristotle, he took the basic insight of the division of being into potency and act, and from Plato the doctrine of participation, and he blended both together.

His metaphysics is not, however, just a synthesis of Aristotle and Plato. He utilized Aristotle's insight regarding potency and act, and Plato's insight regarding participation. But his original insight is what the Bible states about God (Exodus 3): I AM WHO AM, i.e. that God *is esse*, whereas all other beings *have esse*. With this in mind he came across Plato's doctrine of participation. But Plato was only talking

about the *predicamental* participation of concepts (“man” participating of “animal”, for example), and in fact he was confused because he thought that these concepts have an existence of their own. And as for Aristotle, he never read so much into “act and potency” as St. Thomas did (*esse* = act of being; *essence* = potency of being). St. Thomas is thus above all a Christian teacher, but he assimilated the best of Greek philosophy.

c. The participation of being as basis of the analogy of being

There are things which are more or less perfect. What we observe in reality is many beings, more or less perfect, not just one. Each of these beings is, but it is not Being, i.e. not the whole of being: it only participates in being. Participation means “taking a part”, but from a metaphysical angle, it means *to have or possess an act in a partial, limited and imperfect manner, an act which is found in another in a total, unlimited and perfect manner*.

The first result of participation is *similarity* or *likeness* between the participants and what is participated, as well as between the participants among themselves. For example, we all participate of the essence of man, and this makes us similar to “man” and to one another. Our participation in *being* makes us also similar to one another. Nevertheless, we *are* all very different: the similarity in being is unique, because it makes us both the same and different. This is the *analogy of being* we already discussed in [ch. 11, c.](#) Here we can see that participation in being is the metaphysical foundation of the analogy of being.

God *is* the act of being, and we *participate* in it. Our dependence on God is total, absolute. That is why religion (the expression of this dependence) is the most pervasive, the most real and profound aspect of man, and therefore the creative force of civilization. That *act* which is subsistent and infinite in God, is found in the participants limited by a potency with which it enters into composition. Therefore, participation

- (i) *dynamically* considered is *causality*, i.e. our creation by God;
- (ii) *statically* considered, it is the *composition* of the creature as opposed to the simplicity of the Creator.

Thus, creation is a *free* action of God, because He is the fullness of being, and so, He has no further end to achieve (see, [ch. 24](#)): if He creates, it is therefore a free determination, out of the abundance of His goodness. He is not compelled to create. Creation consists in the participation of being that God gives to the creature.

God *is* the being by essence, while the creature *has* being by participation.

d. Subsistent subject and person: activity follows being

Subsistence is the very essence of substance: it means “to be by itself”. Whatever does not exist by itself is not a substance. Does the *idea* of man exist by itself? It doesn't: ideas do not subsist; they only exist *in* the mind. They are therefore classified as accidents: they perfect the mind. Accidents that perfect the substance are called *qualities*, and this is what ideas or concepts are: qualities of the mind. They have no being of their own: their being is purely accidental.

Only St. Thomas fully realized the ultimate implication of this, because not even Aristotle did quite come to say clearly that *only the individual substance really exists* (the essence by itself does not exist). Aristotle made a distinction between primary and secondary substance, the latter being the “universal” substance such as “man”, thus granting the pure essence some sort of reality, under Plato's influence. Only St. Thomas clearly saw that ideas have no being of their own: they don't *do* anything, they don't produce anything, they don't *act* at all. Action, production, creation, does not come from ideas, but from *efficient causes*, agents, which are *individual substances*, which exist by themselves, which have *subsistence*. Ideas are only *formal* (extrinsic) causes: they don't produce anything. They only *specify* the effect, but the effect is *produced* by the efficient cause, which is the one that has the act of being: in order to *act*, one has to *be*.

This introduces us to the important topic of the *person*. Let us repeat, first of all, that the *real* being is the concrete individual subsistent substance, not the abstract substance (idea), which does not exist by itself and therefore does not act. This concrete individual substance is called *suppositum*, which means “what is placed under”. This includes

- (i) to be the subject of accidents: in Latin, *substare*;
- (ii) to exist by itself: in Latin, *subsistere*.

The first cannot be without the second, although the second can be without the first. A being cannot be the subject of accidents unless it exists by itself. But there may be a being which exists by itself without having accidents: this is the case of God, since He is the fullness of being, and accidents always *perfect* the substance.

Now, what makes a substance subsist? The *act of being*. Ideas and accidents have a certain reality, but they don't have the act of

being by themselves: their act of being is that of the substance. The act of being (i) makes the substance *subsist*, and (ii) enables the substance *to act* (a thing cannot *act* unless it *is*). Activity follows being (*operari sequitur esse*): activity is *second* act; being is *first* act. In order to *act* as an engineer, one has to *be* an engineer; in order to *act* as a Christian, one has to *be* a Christian. The nature of the activity is determined by the nature of the agent: everything acts according to its nature.

Therefore, operations are attributed to a subsistent substance: it is the individual man that is *responsible* for his actions, not his moods or his qualities or his defects or his ideas or his influences: all these are accidents, and accidents do not act by themselves.

e. Individual and person

The Roman philosopher Boethius (5th century) gave the classical definition of “person”: *rationalis naturae individua substantia*, the individual substance of a rational nature: in other words, the rational *suppositum*. As we said in [ch. 15, c](#), “individual” means what is undivided in itself and divided from everything else. The concepts of “individual” and “person” are not equivalent: the “rationality” of the latter makes the difference. Every person is an individual, but not every individual is a person: there are individual things which are not persons.

In the actual individual person, is there any difference between individuality and personality? There is a conceptual (not real) difference: while the individuality is what makes him or her incommunicable and unique, self-enclosed and autonomous, the personality is what characterizes his or her *rational* being, whereby the person is *open to others* by intelligent knowing and loving willing. In reality, however, we cannot split the individuality of a person from his or her personality (by saying, for instance that the former is the body and the latter the soul). A person is *entirely* an individual, and *entirely* a person, although if we look at his or her individuality, we are focusing on his or her undividedness, and on his or her dividedness from everything else; while if we look at his or her personality, we are focusing on his or her openness, through rationality, to being, to knowledge, to love.

Thus, personality is what makes a person rational, and therefore responsible for his actions: his actions come from his being what he is, and he is a person who knows and makes free decisions. When man performs actions, he is free in performing them, and therefore entirely responsible for them (see, metaphysics of man, and

ethics).

Besides being essential in order to understand moral matters, this doctrine on the person casts light on the mystery of the Incarnation. It shows to the extent that is possible how the human nature of Christ is complete in its essence, so that He is “perfect man”. But that human nature is not a person, because the act of being or *esse*, which makes it subsistent (real), is not an *esse* which corresponds to its nature, i.e. a human *esse*, but a divine *esse*: it is the *esse* of the Divine Person that makes the human nature of Christ subsist, but through its “hypostatic” (subsistent) union with the Divine Person. This is why in Christ there is one Person (divine) and two natures (one divine, and the other human).

CHAPTER 12

The Starting Point of the Metaphysical Road

a. *Being, to be, essence, existence*

The metaphysical road begins with the first glance at *being*. Let us now take a closer look at it. In English, “being” is an ambiguous term. Grammatically speaking, it can be a noun, a participle, or a gerund (“a human *being*”; “a *being* from another planet”; “the importance of *being* earnest”).

Latin is more precise in this respect: *ens* is the noun, and *esse* is the verb, but both are declined. Let us see the difference between nouns and verbs, the logic of grammar. There are two types of words: those which do not mean anything by themselves, like prepositions or conjunctions, and those which do. And of the latter, there are two types: the noun and; the verb. The former signifies a reality which is stable by itself, roughly the substance, while the verb designates activity or passivity (accidents). This indicates that our mind tends to gear itself to both the *stable* and the *transient* in reality, because reality is like that: potency and act, and change from potency into act, and this change is called motion. But this does not mean that everything is motion; motion is only an accident of things which are being in themselves.

We thus have two types of terms: to designate what is permanent, we have the noun; to designate what is moving, changing, dynamic (from the Greek for “potency”, because potency is the source of motion), we have the verb. *Ens* is that which has the act of being (in Latin: *ens est id quod habet esse*). There may be something which does not actually exist but is only a possibility, but then it is not an *ens* since it does not have the act of being; it is only an *essence* or “possibility of being”. *Ens*, therefore, is an essence (or manner of being) which has the act of being: *id quod est* or *id quod habet esse*.

This shows that *ens* is composite, not simple. It has a composition of (a) subject of the act of being, and (b) act of being. The former is the thing that is; the “act of being” is reality, not just a mere possibility. The two aspects are not the same, because *to be* is one thing, and the *manner of being* is another. This composition is such that the *esse* (to be) is contracted or limited by the essence or manner of being; the *ens* is only what it *can* be, that is, its essence: it is not everything, but only this type of being, this essence.

We can say that while essence is *that which* the thing is, *esse* is *that by which* the thing is. *Esse*, therefore, is a metaphysical real

component or constituent part of the singular concrete being. It is not something that we grasp as a notion itself, because then it would be a noun. It is not a “thing”, but *that by which* any thing *is*. It is the *actuality* of things, as distinct from their *possibility*. This is why we should not confuse our concepts (abstract essences) with reality or actuality, as we said when talking about logic above.

As for *existence*, it is a rather slippery notion. “To exist” is not quite the same as “to be”. It comes from the Latin (*ex-sistere*), which literally means “to stand out of”. From there comes *existentia* in Latin, and “existence” in English, and it means the *fact* of being, not the act of being. “Fact” comes from the Latin *factum*, which means “made” or finished. Existence signifies the *fact* of being: when something is already there, has come to the act of being, then it *exists*, it “stands out of”, it is no longer a possibility (in German, while “being” is *Sein*, existence is *Dasein* or being-there).

There is a great tendency in modern philosophy to equate existence with being. But “being” refers to the act or actuality of being. The fact that all the things we see have acts of being which are limited by their essences indicates that their being is caused or received. Therefore, someone has made them come to be (though not necessarily in time). And this *one* cannot have come to be, and so it is *pure act of being* without any essence that will limit it, or, in other words, with an essence which is precisely *to be*. What is the essence of God? *To be*, which is not the essence of anything else. Nothing else is by essence, only God.

That is why being is not identical with existence. Existence is the fact of being, “fact” meaning “what is made”. In other words, while *esse* is a metaphysical principle, “to exist” is the *result* of having *esse*. One is the principle, and the other is the result. *Esse* is a principle, because nothing can be without the act of being. *Existere* or to exist is the result of having *esse*.

b. The starting point of metaphysics

The starting point of metaphysics is, then, the notion or concept of being. This first notion of *ens*, however, is most simple and general: it just means the most general or common aspect of everything. From this first notion, we move on to another which is still vague, but already differentiated in some way, after having formed the notion of “non-being” and that of “division” or “difference” (see above). From here we start to differentiate among beings. This stage is, however, not yet on the metaphysical level: metaphysics begins the moment this notion of being appears to us as a *composition* of *subject of the act of being* and

act of being.

c. Metaphysical progress

And how does the metaphysical road proceed from there? It has to be on the basis of having *accepted* being from the beginning, and remaining faithful to that acceptance. This *fidelity* is thereby continuously enriched by daily *experience* in contact with the actuality of things through the senses.

Metaphysical knowledge proceeds moved by the tension between the fact of *limitation* observed in reality (namely *change*, which implies limitation: to become something else that was not before; and *multiplicity*, which also implies limitation) and the *principle of non-contradiction*, which expresses the *stability* of reality, as well as what is *positive* in reality, which is the basis for understanding whatever is *negative*. My personal projects, for instance, are obviously *limited* (subject to *change* and *multiple*), but they are clearly identified in my mind as a *positive* reality, before I can distinguish them from all that they are *not*.

In this real knowledge which we acquire in metaphysics, we do not reason *from* principles, but *in accordance with* them and *in their light*. This is metaphysics, as distinct from mathematics. In mathematics, the opposite way is followed: we start from principles and we reason *from* them: we do not reason about reality at all. Mathematics starts with definitions, and then it draws conclusions from those definitions.

Now, since we can never know the whole of reality at once, it is very important to get used to the fact of not being able to understand anything *completely*. This is also wisdom: there is always more that we can know or learn about reality. We must be modest and humble enough in the presence of what is *purely* intelligible, i.e. beyond the senses and the imagination. Reality is a challenge to our mind, and we must admit that we cannot encompass it. Our mind is indeed geared to the truth, to reality. We *can* understand it, but our understanding of it is not co-extensive with it. Whoever thinks that he understands something perfectly well, runs the risk of misunderstanding, and of not even suspecting that he doesn't understand. And that's a very great risk to take. On the other hand, this does not happen with mathematics. In mathematics either we understand the whole thing or we don't understand anything: the more exact or mathematical a science is, the more it is open to understanding it completely or not at all. This is because abstract quantity (the starting point and object of mathematics) is a clear and distinct concept of the mind, while the

infinite expanse of reality (the starting point and object of metaphysics) infinitely surpasses and outflanks our mind, which cannot cast more than one glance at a time at that immense wealth of intelligibility.

In each of the metaphysical topics all the spontaneous knowledge of common sense is present, so that metaphysics is like ascending by concentric circles, like a spiral staircase, because one follows the same way, higher and higher but still along the same line: the fact of change in the objects of our immediate experience shows the division of being into substance and accidents, wherein what is imperfect, i.e. the accidents, is reduced to its foundation, which is the substance. Motion or change also shows or reveals the real composition of act and potency, in which, again, the imperfect, which is the potency, is reduced and founded on the perfect, which is the act: potency is seen as related to act.

And then, the *act of being* appears as the foundation of every being, as the ultimate act, as the act of all the acts and perfections of everything, as what is most perfect and intimate in everything: the root of its reality as well as the root of its intelligibility. A thing is as *intelligible* as it *is*: the more it is in act, the more intelligible it is.

PART III

Metaphysics

CHAPTER 11

General Introduction to Metaphysics

a. *Metaphysics: the science of being as being*

As explained earlier, metaphysics is the science of being as being. It is called meta-physics because it goes *beyond* the physical or sensible as such, into the purely intelligible order of reality (“meta” means beyond). “Science” is knowledge through causes, and thereby certain, universal and necessary (cf. [ch. 6](#)). It is a knowledge wherein we know the why, because we have traced the cause, not an accidental or fortuitous cause but a necessary cause.

Now, if metaphysics is science of being, what we have to study in metaphysics is the *cause of being*. Making the definition of metaphysics more precise, we can say that it is the *science of the principles and causes of being as being*. Now, since the principles and causes of being *as being* must thereby be the most *universal*, we can say that in metaphysics we study *the highest and ultimate and most universal principles or causes of everything*. This is why metaphysics is called “first philosophy”: the whole of reality falls under its scope.

Metaphysics studies both the *totality* and the *unity* of all things. Why the totality? Because “being” affects absolutely everything. What is the only thing outside “being”? “Non- being”: *nothing is outside the scope of metaphysics*. And why unity? Because what all things have in common, what makes them all one, is being. Things differ in many ways, but in one thing they are exactly the same: in that they *are*, they exist. Since being is what all things are, and makes them all one, we study the unity of all beings. This is the metaphysical vision: that is why it is the highest natural wisdom. This makes it the most difficult natural knowledge, not because it is complicated, but because it is the most comprehensive and the deepest.

b. *The object of metaphysics*

We can make a useful distinction here: the *material* and the *formal* object of metaphysics. The former is its subject- matter (all things), and the latter is the *aspect* of that material object considered by metaphysics, namely the aspect of *being*: this is the metaphysical viewpoint, as distinct from that of any other science. Metaphysics is the science that studies the totality of things under the aspect and from the

point of view of being: what *is* it? what *is* it made of? what *is* it for? what has made it come to be?

It is worth noting that when children come to the age of reason, they already show their metaphysical bent, because they ask questions about the being of things: what is this? what is it for?... The first tendency of a human being is to look at the being of things, because the natural object of the intelligence is being. That is why metaphysics is the *natural* science of man, *the* human science, the most congenial to the intelligence. That is why also, if metaphysics is rejected or neglected or despised, something is bound to go wrong somewhere: morals, customs, approach to life...

The catechism of Christian doctrine is full of metaphysics from beginning to end. Our Christian religion gives us the ultimate explanation of everything concerning the purpose of human life, God and morality. It is all exhaustively explained by it, and it is all eminently metaphysical. The simplicity and depth of the Christian faith (supernatural) is matched by the simplicity and depth of metaphysics (natural).

c. Being is analogical

The term “being” is applied to all realities, but *partly in the same sense, partly in a different sense*. This child is a being, this table is a being, God is a being. Does this mean that the child, the table and God are exactly the same? Of course not: they are vastly different from one another; but it is true that each of them is a being. This is very revealing. “Being” applies to many realities partly in the same sense, because they are all beings, and partly in a different sense, because the being of the table is completely different from that of the child, the being of a good deed is completely different from the being of an evil deed. This fact about being is called the *analogy of being*.

When a word is applied to many things always with the same meaning, it is called *univocal*. For example, when we say Peter is a man and John is a man, we are using the word “man” in exactly the same sense: the “manness” of Peter is the same as the “manness” of John; they differ in their individual characteristics, but as far as their manness is concerned they are identical. If a term, on the other hand, has sometimes a meaning and other times a completely different one, it is called *equivocal*: e.g. “table” may mean a piece of furniture or the table of contents of a book.

Now, there are words which are neither univocal nor equivocal, because when they are applied, it is partly in the same sense and partly in a different sense. They cannot be called equivocal, because

the meaning is similar. But neither can they be called univocal, because the meaning changes somehow. For example, the term “cheerful” can apply to a smile, to a thought, to a landscape, to a color, but partly in the same sense and partly in different senses. This type of term is called *analogical*, from the Greek for “proportion”: the subjects to which it applies are equal to one another, but proportionately only: The “cheerfulness” of the landscape is to the landscape what the “cheerfulness” of the smile is to the smile; but they are not identical. And “being” is the most analogical of all terms.

Specifically, we apply *being* to two types of being, two; types of realities into which we can classify beings. What then are the ultimate classifications or categories of beings? As we have already observed, the very first thing we notice when I looking at reality is *change*; and then, that there is no change without *something that changes*. Change cannot exist alone by itself: it is something that inheres in, and belongs to the thing that does not change. And we call what changes, the *accident*, and what remains through the change, the *substance*.

Accidents don't exist in themselves: what supports the accidents is the substance. This is, then, the ultimate classification of being: we can say that being is either substance or accident. And when we apply “being” to both, do we do so in an identical sense in both cases? No, because the being of the substance is a *being in itself and by itself*, while the being of the accident is a *being of the substance or in the substance*. It is partly the same and partly different, since substance is “in itself” and accident is “in the substance”. Both exist, but differently. This is where the analogy of being is best seen.

d. The principle of non-contradiction

The supreme principle of metaphysics is the principle of non-contradiction (cf. [ch. 7, a](#)). Let us recall: It is impossible for something to be and not to be in the same sense and in the same subject.

Let us also recall the two operations of the intellect: (i) operation of making a concept; (ii) operation of affirming or denying: judging or adjusting one's mind to reality. In the first operation, the mind forms the notion of *being*, without which nothing else can be conceived (all our concepts imply the concept of being). It is the *first notion that comes into the mind*, and since metaphysics is the science of being, it is the most natural bent of the intelligence. Not that we actually can remember when we formed our first concept. But we can reconstruct it: we can discover that the first idea was “being” by looking at all our concepts, and realizing that all of them imply the notion of being, which means that we have come to them *after* the notion of

being. We all start, then, with the notion of being: it's part of our humanity. There is here no difference of education, culture, talent or sex: a human being naturally and spontaneously goes to the notion of being the moment he starts knowing. This is, then, the most profound core of being-human: the search for the meaning of existence.

If the first notion is "being", the second must be "non- being". Not that we can remember it either, but, again, we can reconstruct it: by saying "being", nothing is excluded, which means that the second idea, after being, must be "nothing" or "non-being". And the *third* idea must be that of *division*, since by confronting being with non-being we *divide* them: being is not non-being. We jump here into the second operation of the mind: alongside the notion of division, we make the first judgment, which is the principle of non-contradiction (being is not non-being). "Notion" is "first operation", and "judgment" is "second operation".

At this point, we must make the very important observation that contradiction is impossible because *that* is the way *reality* is, not because it is our manner of thinking: contradiction is impossible not because it is *unthinkable*, but because it *cannot happen in reality* (modern philosophy, on the other hand, often puts *thought* before *being*). The principle of non-contradiction is an *evident judgment* based on the notion itself of being. It is not just an axiom of thought: it is not rooted in, and founded on thought, but rooted in, and. founded on being.

This principle is *self-evident to all*. It arises in the intelligence in a natural way as *an effect of the truth itself*, of the truth of things themselves, starting from the *experimental* knowledge of the terms of that judgment. These terms are "being" and "non-being", and we have an experimental or *empirical* (sensible) knowledge of them. And starting from that immediate experience, we see the truth of things, and the effect of this is the principle of non-contradiction. This principle is self- evident *to all*, because these two terms (being and non-being) are naturally known by everybody.

It is the *first* principle of *all* demonstration or proof, because it springs from the very first notions that come into; the mind, and cannot therefore be demonstrated by another principle which would be more evident. It is not at all like *hypothesis*, because a hypothesis is only a kind of tentative principle in need of testing, but this principle is the *first natural certainty* of the human mind. And it is *as such* assumed by all sciences.

Marxism, following Hegelian dialectics (see [ch. 48, b](#)) has denied the principle of non-contradiction, but this is not the only philosophy that has denied it: Aristotle in his time, four centuries before Christ, already refuted those who were attacking it. Can we *prove* the

truth of this principle against those philosophies? We have just said that it cannot be proved, since it is precisely the beginning of *all* proof, of all demonstration. What can be done, however, is to show the absurdity of denying it by simply showing the opposite: “a thing can be itself and another in the same sense”; “I can be myself and another at the same time”... Marxism says that there is no such thing as being: there is only a *process of becoming* (see [ch. 48, c](#)). This is due to the intrinsic atheism of this philosophy: it starts by denying God, because God is “the being that cannot change”.

e. Importance of metaphysics for theology

As we have seen, metaphysics is indispensable not only for natural theology but for supernatural theology, because only a philosophy of reality, of being, is capable of receiving scientifically the truth of the faith just as it is, i.e. as supernatural reality.

In other words, the faith is a supernatural reality: therefore, only a philosophy which deals with reality can scientifically receive the faith and become theology. It is in the reality of being, of the *act of being*, of the *to be* of things, that in a certain way we have a common ground, a meeting point of the natural and the supernatural, because the act of being is found in all things as a *participation*. God is the *fullness* of being; things *partake* of being.

Philosophy receives the faith, and then, enlightened by the faith, it grows into theology, which is the deeper understanding of revelation. What is the faith? Two things: what God reveals, and our act of believing it. And what is theology? The better understanding on our part of what God has revealed to us. How can we better understand these things revealed by God? Among other things, with the help of metaphysics. Why? Because metaphysics focuses ultimately on the divine as such: it is the human common ground with the divine. That is why, as we said, the catechism of Christian doctrine is full of metaphysics: most questions in it have metaphysical implications.

Theology is made *starting from* the faith, but philosophy is the instrument of theology, and more specifically the *metaphysics of being*, not a metaphysics of “thought” or “idea”. This metaphysics of being supplies theology with the basic notions which are necessary to understand the content of revelation to the extent that is possible to the human mind: notions such as substance, accidents, causality, subsistence nature, person, etc.

CHAPTER 48

Contemporary Philosophy

a. Overall view

We can say that “contemporary” philosophy begins in the 19th century, and more specifically with the cultural age of Romanticism: the prevalence of *feeling* and *life*, a sort of gigantic movement *to objectify human subjectivity*, a climax of immanentism.

To single out the most significant philosophies of this period, let us take a look at the following passage from the encyclical of Pius XII, *Humani generis* (1950):

“While scorning our philosophy, they extol other philosophies of all kinds, ancient and modern, eastern and western, by which they seem to imply that any kind of philosophy or theory, with a few additions and corrections if need be, can be reconciled with Catholic dogma. No Catholic can doubt how false this is, especially where there is question of those fictitious theories they call *immanentism*, or *idealism*, or *materialism*, whether *historical* or *dialectical*, or even *existentialism*, whether *atheistic* or simply the type that *denies the validity of reason* in the field of metaphysics.” (Italics added.)

In the 19th century, there were several attempts by theologians to “re-think” the Christian faith in terms of modern philosophy, without realizing the implications of its immanentism and the fact that it actually arose as a rejection of a Christianity transcendent to man, as we have seen. These attempts were made, for instance, with Kant and with Hegel, but of course, the Church disowned them all. Attempts have been made later with *Henry Bergson* (1859-1941), which provoked the crisis of Modernism and the neo-modernism of *Teilhard de Chardin*, which was also combined with marxist ideas.

b. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Hegel, also influenced by his contemporaries Fichte and Schelling, is one of the most influential thinkers in modern philosophy through his radical immanentism. His system, coming in the wake of Kant and at the height of both the Romantic Movement and the Industrial Revolution, is *absolute idealism*: absolutely everything is reduced to “idea”. But it is “dialectical” idealism. Let us explain this as the basis for the understanding of Marxism.

According to Hegel, all the things we see around us are expressions of ideas: *this* man is an expression of the *idea* of man; *this* table is an expression of the *idea* of table. Now, the most simple of all ideas, and therefore the first, is the idea of *being*. But the idea of being is “negated” by its opposite, which is “non-being”. Both of these ideas are, according to him, “pure indetermination”, hence they neutralize each other, and out of this clash there emerges the synthesis of both: the idea of “becoming”.

But rather than a “synthesis”, this is a *confusion* in Hegel's mind, since the “pure indetermination” of “being” (the richness of content of this concept) is the very opposite of the “pure indetermination” of “non-being” (the poverty of content of this concept). Hegel *confuses* these two concepts — a violation of reality, typical of idealism — and “finds” therein that “idea” is essentially “dialectical”, i.e. it affirms itself (*thesis*), then negates itself (*antithesis*), and then takes the best of both into a higher stage of development (*synthesis*). Thus, “idea”, i.e. reality, is essentially a *becoming*: change and temporality are real, immobility and eternity are not.

This is then “dialectical idealism”: ideas progressively *negating* each other, thereby *mediating* each other, and *synthesizing* into higher ideas: “conflict” and “change” are at the very heart of reality, as Heraclitus had already said in the 6th century B.C., and all reality is in a state of flux. “Dialectics” means the confrontation of ideas and their development through it: thus the human spirit (*Geist*) reveals itself to itself in a “phenomenology” incarnated in the cultural history of mankind.

Hegel opened Pandora's box with his dialectics. It is significant that “opposition” or “contradiction” (*Widerspruch* = counter-statement) is the soul of his contemporary romantic movement in other cultural fields (Goethe and Beethoven were both contemporaries of Hegel), as well as the idea of “challenge” in the Industrial Revolution then taking place. The romantic mood rebelled against anything that would put limits or rules to the “free feeling” of the “human spirit”, and recognized no authority above it, while the thrust for industrial development and wealth increase would brook no trammels to “free enterprise”

c. Marxism

Of the philosophies mentioned by Pius XII in the quotation, let us now take *materialism: historical* and *dialectical*. This is precisely what *Karl Marx* (1818-1883) called his philosophy, which now dominates such large areas of the world.

“Historical materialism” is the philosophy which maintains that

all history is *determined* (cf. [ch. 30, c](#)) by the *economic structure* of society, i.e. by the system of production, distribution and exchange of material goods, and their ownership. According to Marx, in every society there is an “infrastructure”, which is the economic system of “production forces” and “production relations”, and a “superstructure” built on it, made up of all the customs, institutions, values, laws, cultural traits and artistic expressions, all of them *determined* by the economic system (cf. [ch. 30, c](#)).

“Dialectical materialism” is like any other kind of materialism in that everything is reduced to matter, but with the addition of “dialectics” (marxists always claim that their materialism is “scientific”, not like the other “crass” materialisms). Marx took from Hegel both the dialectics and the revolutionary bent, but transposed them both to the field of matter, economics and politics, through a radical atheism and materialism inherited from *Ludwig Feuerbach* (1804-1872); from the 18th century French materialists like Diderot, Lamettrie and Holbach; and from the British pragmatic materialists like Hume, Adam Smith and Ricardo, ideologists of the Industrial Revolution.

Marx thought that Hegel had indeed discovered in the dialectics the secret of reality, but by locating it in the “ideas” he had it upside down, since ideas are only reflections of matter in the human brain: matter is *the only reality*. But dialectics is indeed the inner force of progress *in the evolution of matter*.

When Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, Marx hailed it as the “scientific” confirmation of his “dialectical materialism”: the animal species, in their “struggle for life”, clash with one another, thus evolving into higher species. Thus also, the “social classness” (there are no “individuals” for Marx, since man has nothing that transcends his *material* integration in society) resulting from the dialectical opposition of “exploiters” and “exploited” struggle with one another, by successive dialectical stages, until the perfect society will be achieved without classes and *without private property*, which is the “cause” of the economic “alienation” of those who become “exploited”.

For Marx, religion (“the opium of the people”) is the “ultimate alienation” of man, and “every critique must begin with a critique of religion”; but the most “fundamental” alienation is the *economic* one, which leads to the social and political, and finally to the religious alienation, which according to Marx is the summit of man's degradation. The “revolutionary action” (“praxis”, not “theory”), whose aim is the abolition of private property, will finally achieve the “total liberation” of man from all alienations, and the definitive elimination of religion. Here the *earthly future* of mankind is substituted for the transcendence of God and the afterlife, as a result of eliminating everything transcending pure matter, such as the spirituality and

immortality of the human soul: no ground is left, therefore, for the dignity and rights of the human person.

The two standard works of Karl Marx are *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which he published with his friend *Friedrich Engels* (1820-1895) in 1848, and the well-known *Das Kapital*, which was first published in 1867. Between those two works stand Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the development of "historical" materialism into "dialectical" materialism.

Marxism was first successfully imposed *by force* in the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917, led by Lenin (1870-1924), who set up the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* as the "transition" stage of "socialism", envisioned by Marx, whereby the "proletarian" class seizes the "capitalist" state and uses its machinery of power to forcefully integrate everyone into society by appropriating all the means of production and exchange. When this integration has been completed, the state will "wither away", and *communist* society will emerge, where man will be "totally liberated".

It is obvious, once we know it well, that this totalitarian philosophy (it is not just an "economic theory" or a "political system") is *absolutely irreconcilable with Christianity*, and so has the Church declared it from the very beginning. The most lucid and thorough exposition and condemnation of marxist communism is found, as was already mentioned, in the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* (1937) of Pius XI. The reader is also referred to our earlier comments on Marxism in [ch. 1, c](#); [8, d](#); [11, d](#); [14, a](#); [21, j](#); [25, c](#); [32, c](#); [33, a](#) and [c](#); [36, a](#); and in the previous chapter. See also [ch. 43, c](#), on private property.

d. Other kinds of materialism

We can single out three main varieties:

(i) Positivism; (ii) Pragmatism; (iii) Evolutionism.

The three of them are related, and they have a great deal in common with Marxism. Their common root is a materialism which is the result of immanentism (cf. [ch. 21, j](#)). Let us recall the summary we gave in [ch. 44, b](#). After the Renaissance, philosophy went through these two stages:

- (i) Reduction of the supernatural to the natural.
- (ii) Reduction of the natural to the material.

This is quite logical: first, God is eliminated by making Him a product of man. But if there is nothing *above* man, the origin of man

must be *below* him: in animality, brute life, and ultimately *matter*.

Evolutionism then comes into the picture and conceives man as the spearhead of matter in evolution, appropriately clothing itself in "scientific" garb, although the theory of evolution is too full of gaps and "missing links" to be considered scientific, as Pius XII cautioned also in *Humani generis*. Such are the philosophies of Spencer, Bergson, Haeckel, Alexander, Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin.

Besides, if we must confine our knowledge to our materiality, our only "positive" knowledge is the "scientific" knowledge, based on strict observation of "facts", and the "explanation of facts by the facts themselves", as distinct from "imaginative" explanation (theology) or "rational" explanation (metaphysics). Thus we will arrive at the true cult of *humanity*. This is the *positivism* of Comte (1798-1857), later transformed into the *logical positivism* of Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle.

And finally we have the "ethical" approach: What is "good"? What makes man happy. What is "evil"? What makes man unhappy. The latter is pain, the former is pleasure. What is "true"? Whatever "works", i.e. whatever procures the happiness of the individual *in this life*: this is *pragmatism*, the typical American philosophy of the cult of immediacy and efficiency (William James, John Dewey), also related to the British *utilitarianism* of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

These three varieties of materialism, which have developed outside Marxism, could also be called *vitalism*, because, as we said, life, brute life, becomes the basic reality, i.e. life immersed in matter in a state of evolution. Between this "vitalist" materialism and marxist materialism there are many points of contact. For instance, we can detect pragmatism in Marxism, in the latter's philosophy of "praxis", whereby revolutionary *action* makes "the truth", and whatever "works" in favor of it is "progressive" and therefore "good", while the opposite is "reactionary" and therefore "evil". And we can also detect both positivism and evolutionism in the marxist philosophy.

The materialism of "the West" is not therefore totally incompatible with Marxism, but both of them *are* incompatible with Christianity.

e. Existentialism

This is the philosophy mentioned last in the quotation from *Humani generis*. We can apply the term first in a broad sense to a philosophical movement which arose after Hegel, less materialistic than those just discussed, but also affected by subjectivism. As Hegel had attempted the absolute objectification of subjectivity in the sense

explained, other philosophers, without abandoning the *romantic and immanentist spirit* of Hegel's philosophy, reacted against it on behalf of *subjectivity* itself, so to speak. *Schopenhauer* (1788-1860) did so by exalting the *will* above "reason"; *Kierkegaard* (1813-1855), by exalting *existence* above "essence"; and *Nietzsche* (1844-1900), by exalting *active life* above "passive rational conformity"

This was an understandable reaction of individualism against collectivism (cf. [ch. 37, d](#) and [e](#); and [47, b](#)): as we have seen, for Hegel, as for Marx, the individual does not really exist; only man as such, only the *essence* "man" is real, as "only the rational is real", and Marx's classless society will fully *realize* that essence.

More specifically, however, the term "existentialism" has been given to the philosophy of Kierkegaard, and those who, already in the 20th century, have followed his lead, but blending it with both *neo-kantianism* and the no less immanentistic so-called *phenomenology* of *Husserl* (1859-1938). By making a dichotomy between "existence" and "essence", the tendency of existentialism has been to separate and polarize the "subjectivity" of man from the "objectivity" of the world, thus fostering a mood of despair or anxiety in man, seeing himself *alone* by his inability to transcend his own temporality.

Two chief types of existentialism have emerged, as mentioned by Pius XII in the quotation from *Humani generis*: one "atheistic", such as that of *Heidegger* (1889-1976), *Merleau-Ponty* (1907-1961) and *Sartre* (1905-1979); and another which "denies the validity of reason in the field of metaphysics", such as that of Kierkegaard himself and *Gabriel Marcel* (1889-1974). To them we can associate *Jaspers* (1883-1974) and other neo-Kantians influenced also by Nietzsche, such as Scheler and Hartmann.

The subjectivism of all these philosophers keeps them anchored to immanentism, even when they speak of God and profess to believe in Him: hence the statement of *Humani generis*. When we begin in man, rather than in reality itself, we can never transcend man.

As happened before, there have been attempts by theologians to adapt some of these philosophies to the Christian faith. We have mentioned, for example, the case of Teilhard de Chardin and Bergsonism, but although some of their insights are valuable, the overall results are always harmful for Catholic dogma, as *Humani generis* states.

CHAPTER 30

Freedom

a. What is freedom?

In the first place, freedom is not “the power to do whatever we like”, since man is simply incapable of doing always what he likes. There are many things which man would like to do but he cannot, because his power is always limited. He would like to live forever, not to have any illness, to be always young, to know everything... but it is evident that he “cannot have his cake and eat it”.

How can we then think of freedom as the power to do what we like, when we know that this is not possible? This mirage is the product of a transposition of a divine attribute to the creature: it is the illusion of man who wants to be like God. Only God has “omnipotence”, i.e. the power to do what He wants: divine freedom is infinitely greater than created freedom (the latter is participated only).

Nevertheless, in spite of his limitations, it is true that man is free in his choices. Where is then the freedom of man exactly? In the fact that when he chooses something, he does so *by himself*, and there is no power whatsoever that can force his choice (this is the dignity of man). He can be induced or persuaded or attracted, but never forced (see [ch. 18, g](#)). This free choice on the part of man, however, relates not to the end of man in the sense that man would be free to make his own real end, but only in the sense that man is free to determine himself towards that end, as well as to the means to reach it.

St. Thomas defines human freedom as “that property of the human will whereby man determines himself in his acts towards the end”. Obviously, this freedom is limited, and so it is not omnipotence. It is simply that man determines himself, and there is no force from outside himself that can determine him in his choice. What does the intelligence do to the will? It *specifies* the choice, but it does not determine it. It presents things to the will, and the will chooses. It is true that the will cannot operate without the intelligence: how can I want something I do not know? In order to will, I must know: there is no intellectual “appetite” without previous intellectual “knowledge”. But still, the intelligence does not determine the will: it acts as a final cause, or even formal cause, but never as the efficient cause of the will, as we have said.

St. Thomas also observes that on the will depends “to will” or “not to will”, i.e. the will has the power to move itself, as we have

explained. This means that creatures with will, i.e. spiritual creatures, order themselves towards the end, unlike other creatures, which are already ordered to their end by the fact that they exist.

b. Inner freedom and exterior freedom

So far, we have been talking about the *inner* freedom of the will, namely the freedom (i) to want or not to want (“freedom of exercise”), or (ii) to want this or that (“freedom of specification”).

But there is also an *exterior* freedom to perform operations externally, which can be curtailed by forces outside man. If a man is put in jail, he has lost his exterior freedom, but no one can take away from him his inner freedom: it is something *inalienable*, i.e. it cannot be lost or taken away from anybody. Political freedom, professional freedom, academic freedom are exterior freedoms.

This freedom of the will is also a proof of the spirituality of the act of the will, because purely material acts are always necessary, in such a way that they are directed to the end without any choice. On the other hand, the act of the will is directed to the end in such a way that there is an alternative.

c. Freedom of choice: determinism

It has been said that man has no freedom of choice, that he chooses as necessarily as anything else. This is called *determinism*, and there are many types of it, depending on what they think determines the will, e.g.:

(i) *Physiological* determinism: the will is determined by the biochemistry of the body, by the so-called gut feeling.

(ii) *Sociological* determinism: man is determined by the cultural values he has inherited.

(iii) *Economic* determinism: man's choice is determined by the economic infrastructure (Marxism: see [ch. 48, c](#)).

(iv) *Fatalistic* determinism: the choice is determined by fate (good or bad kick).

(v) *Theological* determinism: God determines the choice of man (Calvinism).

(vi) *Psycho-analytical* determinism: choices are determined by the basic “complexes” of man, a combination of “libido” (Freud) and all the accumulated experiences of the past (Jung).

The logical consequence of determinism (and we can see that

all these types are largely materialistic in inspiration) is that man is stripped of his moral responsibility: his guilt is “transferred” to some other source. Thus, in the last analysis they are all forms of *escapism*.

The existence of freedom of choice in the human will (and consequent moral responsibility) is shown by appealing to two types of evidence:

(i) The evidence of self-consciousness, whereby any man can verify within himself that when he chooses, he could perfectly well have chosen the opposite if he only wanted to.

(ii) The evident fact of a universal acceptance of a moral code and of *legal responsibility*, which would be unwarranted if man were not responsible for his actions. What would be the point of a legal system, judges and courts? If man is determined in his choices, no one can attribute any responsibility to his acts: he would always be like an irresponsible minor, who cannot be tried by any court.

Those who deny human freedom of choice live in a society which does not accept such a denial. Since the moral order and the social order are built on the assumption that man is free, and thereby responsible, the acceptance of determinism would spell the collapse of society.

d. The root of the freedom of man

Why is man free and not necessitated in his choices? What is the metaphysical root of this freedom? It lies in the object of the will, namely the good “in a universal sense” (cf. [ch. 29, a](#)). Let us recall that this is why the will is directed to the *fullness of real* good. And this is where man's self-determination lies, since in this life, man can never be confronted with the “fullness of good”, (i) because no created good is the fullness of good, and (ii) because even God, in this life, is only known by man *imperfectly*, and therefore this knowledge is not the fullness of good either.

Therefore, since no good in this life is the fullness of good, none of them can determine the will of man necessarily. They can attract the human will, but not determine it necessarily. This is why the human will is free, and not necessitated: no outside force can overcome it or coerce it, as long as man is in possession of his faculties.

e. Freedom and necessity

The closer one is to God, the more freedom one has from the necessity of material causes: the more material a being is, the more determined and the less free it is; and the more spiritual, the less determined and the more free.

For the will to be actuated necessarily, this necessity has to come from itself: it can only occur if the will is confronted with the fullness of real good, which, being the object of the

will, is what really makes the will happy without limits. Can this happen in this life? As we just said, in this life there can be no *necessary* actualization of the will.

In Heaven, however, being confronted by the fullness of its object, the will adheres to God necessarily, although this necessity is not a necessity of coercion from outside, but a necessity *from the will itself*. It is not, therefore, a negation of; freedom, but its perfection, as *it makes the willing more unailing*. While the willing in this life can easily fail, since this is one of the limitations of our freedom, in Heaven, on the other hand, in confrontation with the good as such, the will can no longer fail. This is the *perfection of freedom*, since it is a self-determination which can no longer fail.

The difficulty that states that in Heaven there is no freedom since “we can no longer sin” is a fallacy. The answer is that the freedom in Heaven is no longer a freedom of choice, but the perfect freedom of the will, because the essence of freedom is self-determination, from inside. And this is what the will does in front of God, clearly seen: to determine itself from the inside, unailing, without any necessity of coercion- from outside. The saints in Heaven participate in that greater freedom to love, which is the freedom of God. What seems to be a necessity in Heaven is in fact the greatest freedom to love the Total Good, and brings with it the greatest inner self-determination towards the good.

f. Freedom and the good

Man sometimes chooses evil things. What is the relationship between freedom and the good? We have said that the object of the will is “good as such”. The freedom of choice with regard to created things is pointless if it is separated from the love of God, who is the Total Good.

Now, human choices with regard to created goods condition our lives to concrete situations which exclude other situations. If I choose to travel to a certain town, I cannot at the same time go to another town. When I make a choice, I condition my life: freedom of choice is conditioned.

Nevertheless, in every concrete situation man can and should love God and give glory to Him by relating all his choices to the last end, and thus increasing his freedom, as we have explained.

g. Free volition of evil

But can man love evil as such? We already answered this in the negative (cf. [ch. 19, g](#) and [29, a](#)). The so-called choice of evil, or sin, consists in wanting a certain good but in a disorderly way, i.e. something which is not due (disorderly, because the order of means to end is disrupted). We can, in this light, see the essence of sin. What is the end of man? God. Therefore, if man fails to love God, he falls into sin. It does not matter where he falls: he falls away from God. This is sin: the failure to love God followed by *a choice of a participated good in preference to the fullness of good*. The defect or failure is in the free will that fails to love as it should.

Consequently, the will moves the intelligence to omit thinking about God, i.e. about the good which is rejected. This is the voluntary intellectual defect to be found in sin: in every sin there is an error of the intelligence. But it is a *voluntary* error, a failure to consider what the will does not want: “I don’t want God, so I will not think of Him. I will rather think of my own interest, of what I like”. It is both a decision of the will and a failure of the intelligence, moved by the will.

The first motion of the will comes from God, and then the motion of the will as “second cause” (cf. [ch. 29, f](#)). Does this mean that God can cause sin? The answer is that the sinful action *as a being* is caused by God like every being, but the *defect* in it is the result of the free choice of the creature. It is the created will that makes the sin a sin, not God. God causes the act of the will as a being, but the wrong direction of the will comes from the will itself. The will can point either to the good or to the evil, but the actual motion towards either of them comes from God. Nevertheless, God moves His creatures in accordance with their nature (see [ch. 24, g](#)), and the will is free, as we have seen. Therefore, He moves it in accordance with its freedom.

CHAPTER 29

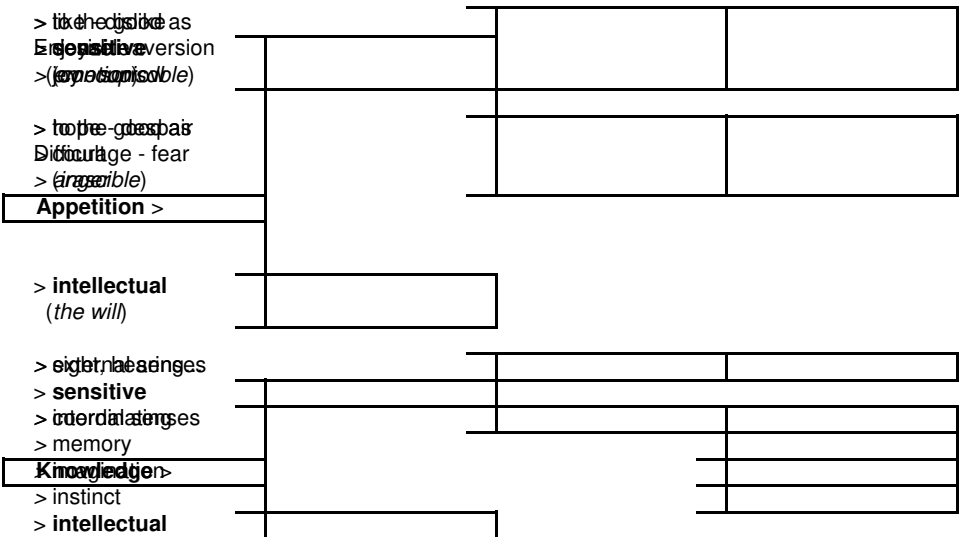
The Will

a. Nature and object of the will. The emotions

First, let us distinguish between *knowledge* and *appetition*. Knowledge can be either sensible or intellectual, but every act of knowledge is followed by an *appetition*, i.e. a *tendency* (from Latin *ad-petere* = to tend to) either towards or away from the object. From the *feeling* of the instinct about the goodness or badness of the object follows a sensitive tendency (also called *emotion* or *passion*) towards or away from the object respectively; and from the *judgment* of the intelligence follows the free intellectual tendency of the will (see [ch. 27, a](#)).

Sensitive appetite or emotion is therefore the tendency to the sensitive good. There are two types:

- (i) *concupiscible* emotion: the tendency to the good as enjoyable;
- (ii) *irascible* emotion: the tendency to the good as difficult to attain.



There are then eleven sensitive appetites or emotions. Animals also have them, and this explains their rich psychological life. In fact, the way to understand the nature of the will, as a distinctly human

faculty, is to compare it with the emotional life of the animal. On the same object, the emotion and the will can easily differ: a man may *choose* (will) not to drink a glass of whiskey even though *emotionally* he may be attracted to it. "I *like* it, but I don't *want* it". This is very important for moral choices, as we must distinguish between a *feeling* (and consequent *emotion*) and the *judgment* (and consequent *decision*): only the latter carries moral responsibility, since only the latter is "human" as distinct from "animal".

The object of the intelligence is "being", as we have seen, while the object of the will is the "good" *as apprehended by the intelligence*, not as felt by the senses. This is why the will can be directed to objects which are not sensible at all, such as power, wisdom, honor, glory and so forth.

Now, how does the intelligence apprehend the good, as "particular" or as "universal"? Let us recall that concepts (the products of the intelligence) are universal; so, when the intelligence looks at being in its aspect of goodness or desirability, it does so in a universal sense, i.e. in the global context of the totality of reality: in an absolute sense, not in a relative and particular sense; in short the good *as such*. This does not mean that the will is moved by "abstract" good. In fact, it's the very opposite: the will is attracted only by concrete *real* actual being (only real being *is* good), but it moves towards it because the intelligence presents it as good in an absolute sense.

Not only is the will attracted only to *real* good (never to a concept as such), but to the *fulness* of good, which is the perfection of "good as such", and therefore the only object that can truly satisfy the will completely. This explain man's natural tendency to God. Man is never satisfied with participated goods: he always wants *more*.

It follows from this also that the will can never want *evil in itself*, since it is the very opposite of its object, which is the good. What then is the "inclination to evil"? It is not really an inclination to evil as such, but to a certain good *in a disorderly way*, i.e. without relating it to the ultimate good. All the things that exist are good, because they have been created by ' God, and "to be" is always better than "not to be". Evil, then, is not in wanting them, but in wanting them in a disorderly way: only human choices can be evil, not the things themselves.

b. The good of man

Since the object of the will is the good, it includes the good of man. The will, therefore, directs man towards his good, i.e. towards his end; and it also moves all the other potencies, habits and acts of each person towards that end. St. Thomas says that the will is the queen of

all human faculties.

The result of the will's attainment of the good is joy and happiness. *Happiness* is the sense of satisfaction that follows the possession of the good that fills all the desire of the will. There is a natural or inborn desire for happiness in every human being, that can only be achieved by the possession of the supreme good, which is God: the union with God through knowledge and love (beatific vision).

Now we can see why the will is, like the intelligence, a *spiritual* potency: (i) because its object is the good in a universal or absolute sense, and (ii) because it reflects upon itself (it can want *to want*).

c. The will and the last end

As we have said, the will tends to the good as *real* and *full*: this is the *last* end of man, while other goods can only be *intermediate* ends.

If by “end” is meant the point to which the tendency is directed, it is of the essence of the will to be moved *always* by a “last end”, namely that for the sake of which the will *ultimately* acts (see [ch. 18, g](#)).

The will has to face up to this sooner or later. In every human decision there is always an *implicit* last end, which can become *explicit* by asking questions about the motivation (Why this? Because of x. And why x? Because of y. And why y? Because of z...). These questions will eventually lead to the last end: *either God or self*.

It is obviously vital for man to face this choice seriously in life and to help others to do so: to commit oneself.

d. Natural inclination of the will as distinct from actual choice

The natural inclination of the will is therefore its tendency to the last end in general: it is the inborn desire for happiness, in which the will has no choice. This marks one of the limits of our freedom. It is not a matter of choice: everybody wants to be happy, as naturally as flowers open towards the sun or as the sun rises every morning.

St. Thomas calls this natural inclination of the will “natural love”: the direction towards God which man has in his being. And related to it is also the natural inclination to love his fellow-men, as well as to love one's self. St. Thomas distinguishes this “natural love” from the “supernatural love” infused by divine grace, which does not replace that natural tendency of man, but brings it to perfection.

Now, by *actual choice* is meant the concrete actualizations of that “natural inclination”. There are two possibilities:

(i) The choice is in the right direction, i.e. in accordance with the natural inclination, in which case man perfects himself since he actualizes something good.

(ii) The choice is wrong, either because it is not actuated (sin of omission: failure to love), or because it is actuated in the wrong way by perverting the natural inclination, e.g. by loving one's self more than God, thus failing to perfect oneself. The “natural love” in this case continues to be present in man, but as a *frustrated* inclination which causes unhappiness.

The most important and fundamental choice in the life of a human being is the choice of God as his last end. Although man has no choice in the natural inclination, he has it in actualizing it with a concrete option. This fundamental choice of the last end has a paramount influence on all his other choices, although in this life it is neither irrevocable nor unrepeatable. None of our choices in this life is irrevocable unless we *choose* it to be: our choices must be renewed from moment to moment. The only really irrevocable choice is the one man makes *last* in his life, on the threshold of eternity. When this choice is made, it is irrevocable because there is *no more time* to make other choices after that. This explains the “eternity” of Heaven or Hell. Heaven is the *result* of the *final* choice of God (that is why we need the grace of “final perseverance”), while hell is the *result* of the *final* choice against God.

e. Will and intelligence

The will and the intelligence are two different potencies, as we have seen, but united in the spiritual soul. They are related to each other, but it is always the person that acts (not the potencies themselves) with his intelligence and his will (see [ch. 16, d](#)).

There is an interaction between the intelligence and the will *with regard to their object* in that (i) the intelligence tends to “being”, and presents it to the will as “good”, and (ii) the will tends to the “good” as “real being” and the “fullness of being”.

This intertwining of intelligence and will is an expression of the unity of man (see [ch. 25, c](#)).

f. Causality of the act of the will

How does the intelligence influence the will? The intelligence *presents* the object to the will as good, but it is the will itself that *determines* itself. In other words, the will is influenced by the intelligence as *final cause*, but it moves itself as *efficient cause*.

Nothing can move itself if it is a potency (see ch. 22, b). Because I am in act, I can move a part of myself, e.g. my leg: only an act can move a potency. Now, since the will is a potency, the initial move has to come from outside the will, and this is where God comes into it necessarily, since the intelligence does not influence the will *efficiently*. The first motion of the will, therefore, the first inclination towards the good, must come from a *direct motion from God*. God moves the will as “first efficient cause” giving it the active inclination towards good, and then the will moves itself or carries on the motion as “second cause” to actually will this or that (the actual choice) (see ch. 18, d).

g. The will and human behavior

Human behavior is, therefore, made up of voluntary acts, whether these acts are direct decisions of the will (“elicited”) or acts of other potencies of man moved by the will (“commanded”), like the act of walking. (See [ch. 39, a](#))

Now, voluntary acts involve acts of intelligence. A decision made without thinking is “imprudent”. A prudent decision requires *deliberation*, which is a combination of acts of intelligence and acts of the will. Intelligence, will and practical intelligence (intelligence directed to action) are the elements involved in *human* behavior. The emotions also come into play, although they should be ruled by reason, as we said. A man who thinks without emotion does not act like a man, since the emotions and senses are also human, but they must be ruled by the intelligence and will.

Of all man’s potencies, therefore, the most powerful is the will. It is the “queen” of all the powers of man and dominates all others: it is the closest power to the self. This is why for the moral struggle for sanctity, which is the perfection of man’s being, it is necessary for man to be detached from his will and to contemplate God, to look towards God with his intelligence moved by the love of God, so that he will do God’s Will and not his own, and guide his emotions in that direction.

CHAPTER 27

Simple Apprehension

a. Understanding begins in the senses

The product of simple apprehension is the concept, which is the first step in the process of understanding. We know, however, that man has not only intelligence but also? sensibility. He has both external and internal senses, like the animals. These senses are potencies with their corresponding acts, just like the intelligence. It is through the *external senses* (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting) that we are in *direct contact* with reality, and it is reality that actuates all our knowing powers.

But we also have *internal senses* (just like the animals, again), which (i) are not in direct contact with reality; (ii) depend on the external senses for their supply; and (iii) elaborate on the data of the external senses and communicate with the intelligence. These internal senses are:

(i) *Coordinating sense or consciousness*: the internal sensibility (in Latin, *sensus communis*) which makes the animal or man conscious of sensible *objects*. The external senses are geared to specific sensible *qualities*, such as sound or color (although they also grasp other sensible qualities related to *quantity*, such as length). When we perceive sensible objects, however, like a table or a house, we perceive them as “objects”, not just as shapes or colors. This means that there is another sense, an internal sense, which perceives them as a *totality*. This is also how we can distinguish between a “perception” and a simple “sensation”, as well as between the different types of sensations.

(ii) *Memory*: the power to recognize past sense experience *precisely as past*.

(iii) *Imagination*: the power to *reproduce* sense experiences and *elaborate* on them.

(iv) *Instinct*: the power to *feel* the good or ill of the sensible experience without *thinking* — called also “estimative” power, from Latin *aestimare* = to feel —, which leads the animal to react with emotion as to whether a thing is good or bad for it. In man, this power is called “cognitive” power, from Latin *cogitativa* (*cogitare* = to think).

In man, these four internal senses are between the external senses and the intelligence, not to be confused with the latter,

although in close relationship with it. Man is one single being *in act*, although he has many potencies. All these potencies, including the most matter-bound, are affected by the unity of his being, i.e. by *humanity*. This happens above all at the highest point of human sensitivity, which is the *cogitativa*. This potency is also called *ratio particularis* in man (as distinct from *ratio universalis*), namely “reason applied to what is individual or particular”, because it is the area of human knowledge wherein sensibility and intelligence overlap.

Once the senses are actuated by material reality, they produce the sensible experience, also called *phantasm*, composed of the sensations of the external senses, and the perceptions, images and recollections of the internal senses. The “phantasm” is the final product of the senses presented to the intelligence. It is only then that the intelligence is actuated, due to the union of body and soul, as we have seen. The “simple apprehension” whereby the intelligence grasps the essences of things begins, then, with sense activity, with the sensible experience (cf. [ch. 9, c](#)). This is why the intelligence does not really start operating until the senses have reached a certain development in the person, including organic development. This explains why the “age of reason” is about seven. It is only around that age that man has developed his senses sufficiently so as to provide the material for the intelligence. Before that age, the intelligence is in potency and will be actuated in due time.

The intelligence, being a complete potency with regard to all knowable things, has *no innate or inborn ideas*, as the 17th century rationalists maintained: we get all our ideas through our contact with reality, not from the intelligence itself. This is also why if the senses are defective, they also affect the intelligence.

The senses get to know the sensible qualities and the sensible objects, but the intelligence *penetrates into the essence of things*, which is purely intelligible or trans-sensible. All the sensible qualities are *accidents* of things, since they do not exist *by themselves*: that's how we know the substance, as the purely intelligible being which exists by itself (see metaphysics, [ch. 7, b](#), and [ch. 13](#)).

The intelligence looks into the intelligible essence of things, i.e. all that is *essential*, as distinct from what is *incidental*; but it is in the *sensible experience* that the intelligence grasps the being of things. The first act of the intelligence, namely the first concept (“being”) and the first judgment (“being is not non-being”) are produced on the level of sensible experience. This is when the intelligence is first actuated. What applies to the senses applies also to the intelligence: it has not only *receptivity* in the process of knowledge, but also *activity*, since it acts on the products of the senses by *enlightening* them in such a way that they *reveal* or expose the intelligible essence that they have.

b. Abstraction: from the sensible to the intelligible

Abstraction is the *process whereby the intelligence grasps the essence and separates it from what is non-essential*. By this process, the intelligence goes from the sensible to the intelligible (cf. [ch. 9, b, c](#)). The content of the intelligible forms that we see through the senses has to be “separated” from the individuating matter. This active role of the intelligence is called *agent intellect*, and its activity is “abstraction”, i.e. the act of disengaging the intelligible form from the material individuation. It is compared to what the light does: the intelligence (agent intellect) is like a light which exposes the intelligible form. This exposure brings with it the expression of the intelligible form by the intelligence, which is then called receptive intellect or *possible intellect*. The agent intellect does not “understand”: it exposes what is intelligible. The possible intellect receives the “impression” in itself, and the final product is the “concept”, which is completely immaterial, as we saw above, and thereby shows the spirituality of the intelligence. (See [ch. 31, a](#))

c. Impression of the intelligible form on the intellect

This impression is called *intelligible species* (from Latin *species* = likeness). The intelligence, as possible or receptive intellect, receives the intelligible species.

Before understanding, the intelligence is in potency with regard to the intelligible forms which are going to actuate it. This potentiality is gradually actuated and enriched through the impression of intelligible forms, which become like qualities of the actuated intelligence. The intelligence is capable of storing these impressions in what is called “intellectual memory”.

How then does the intelligence grasp reality? Obviously, the intelligence does not swallow the actual thing itself. It is through some sort of go-between or medium that the intelligence grasps reality, namely the “intentional” presence of the object in the intelligence (cf. [ch. 14, b](#)). This likeness or species of the object *actuates* the intelligence by *in-forming* it, i.e. putting forms in it.

d. The act of understanding

The act of understanding is the act of two potencies: (i) the

potency of the thing to be known by the intelligence (passive potency), and (ii) the potency of the intelligence to know the thing (active potency).

We have called the likeness or species of the thing which brings the intelligence into act “intentional species” (from Latin *intendere* = to point to), because it points to the thing, it directs the mind to reality. This species, however, is obviously not the thing itself, which means that our knowledge of things is always incomplete. No single intentional species gives us the entire object: many species have to “inform” the intelligence about the same thing. (See [ch. 15, a](#))

This dependence of the intelligence on reality is further highlighted by the fact that intelligence, being passive initially, becomes active after first being actuated by the intelligible species or form (this *realist* vision is opposed by modern *idealism*, which makes reality depend on, or even flow from the human mind).

From the intellectual species we move to the concept. The intellectual species is also called *impressed species*: after it has “informed” and thus actuated the possible intellect, the intelligence expresses a mental word which is called the *concept* (“expressed species”). These two species are the “medium” we just mentioned. The impressed species is medium through which (*medium quo*), and the expressed species is medium in which (*medium in quo*). If I look at something through my glasses, the glasses are a medium “through which”, but if I look at a reflection in a mirror, the mirror is a medium “in which” The impressed species is not something that we see or look at, but something “through which” we are able to see. On the other hand, when the intelligence has produced its own concept (expressed species), it can proceed to study the reality expressed by that concept “in” the concept itself:

(impressed species glasses) which through	
(expressed species mirror) in which	

In either case, the species is always a *sign* of the reality that it signifies. “Concept” comes from “conception”, because in a sense the concept is like a child of the mind: it is neither reality itself nor the intelligence alone, but the result of the union of both. Reality actuates the intelligence, and thus somehow fertilizes it, and the fruit is the concept.

The concept should be clearly distinguished from the sensible image. The latter represents accidents which are sensible, individual and material, while the former signifies the intelligible, universal and immaterial reality in those sensible things. For example, the image of a

table is very definite: we can clearly imagine it. But the concept of table cannot be imagined, since it applies to *all* tables (if something cannot be imagined, this does not mean that it cannot be understood). (See [ch. 9, e](#))

e. Characteristics of human concepts

Concepts are completely different from material and individual things, since (i) they are universal, while things are individual; (ii) they are abstracted, i.e. reduced to their essences and separated from what is incidental, while things are concrete and individualized; (iii) they are immaterial or spiritual (cf. [ch. 8, d](#)).

We should therefore avoid the temptation to confuse concepts with things, which man is very prone to, not realizing that concepts are only reflections of things in our mind. They can help us to understand reality, but should not be identified with it. As we just said, the species which is impressed in our intelligence is always partial and incomplete. We never know reality completely: we need to keep in continuous contact with it. Our knowledge of reality is not complete and absolutely true until it reaches the *singular*, because only the singular really has the act of being (see [ch. 16](#)).

Now, once the concept has been formed in the mind, man has the power to express it. He does so by means of *articulate sounds* (see [ch. 25, d](#), and [26, a](#)). The sounds made by animals express only emotions, which, as we shall see, are the tendencies elicited by sensible experience. In addition to these, man utters articulate or regular sounds which express concepts, and thus he communicates his thought to other men. And he does this not only by speech, but by other signs in writing or drawing, which transmit thought farther in space and time. This shows the presence of intelligence in man. It is interesting to note, on the other hand, that many animals possess both the organs of speech and those of writing, and thus organically they could both speak and write, but they, have nothing to communicate except emotions, and these can be communicated just by inarticulate sounds or by gestures.

f. Knowledge of the singular

What does the intelligence know directly, the singular or the universal? The *direct* object of the intelligence is the universal concept (the essence stripped of all individuating conditions). However, *the concept is abstracted from the singular*. We always learn a new

science starting from concrete examples and cases: abstractions don't mean anything at all unless they can be seen as arising from concrete things (this is a basic principle in education).

In order to understand the concrete singular as such, the intelligence, after having formed the universal concept, returns to the original experience (see internal senses) that has led it to the universal, and superimposes the universal on the concrete beings (compares "table" to this or that table): this operation is called "return to the phantasm" (*conversio ad phantasma*), and it leads to further "information", i.e. to increasing knowledge, always in close contact with reality.

After this description of "simple apprehension" or first operation of the mind, we can already see the spirituality of the act of understanding, and therefore of the human soul.

But we can also see the fact that the intellectual knowledge *begins* in the senses and *returns* to the senses: the "act of being" (light of the intelligence) is in concrete sensible reality, while abstracted concepts are only "essences".

This close interdependence of senses and intelligence also shows the unity of man, against the Cartesian "duality" of soul and body. Overlooking this interdependence and interactivity has led to the errors of rationalism and empiricism, i.e. of reducing human knowledge to only intelligence or to only sensibility.

CHAPTER 31

The Human Soul

a. Spirituality of the human soul

We are going to look at the human soul now in the light; of what we have discovered in the intelligence and the will as potencies of the soul.

It is quite clear that what makes a man to be a man is not to have a body or life or emotions (animals have all these too), but to have intelligence and freedom, powers which, as we have seen, are spiritual (cf. [ch. 26, b](#); [27, b](#); [29, b](#)). This means that the “substantial form” of man, or what makes a man to be a man, must be a “formal act” or “principle of life” (soul) whose nature is spiritual, and which actualizes the body and all its potencies, and constitutes a substantial human unity composed of body and soul (see [ch. 7, c](#); [15, b](#); [18, c](#); [24, e](#); [27, f](#)).

This spirituality of the human soul makes it a very special type of substantial form, since it has a “subsistence” of its own (cf. [ch. 13, b](#)): it is not totally absorbed by the body but exceeds the body, so to speak; it not only in-forms the body but is an act in itself. In other words, when the body dies the soul lives on by virtue of its own subsistence: the human soul, as we shall see, is immortal.

b. The soul as substantial form of the body: no reincarnation

The union of the spiritual soul with the body is substantial, i.e. they make up a single substance, one being, one man (see [ch. 25, c](#), and [27, f](#)). When I say, “I see or touch this thing”, this “I” is the same one who says, “I understand or want this thing”. There is a unity of activity in man because there is a unity of being in him.

Philosophers of Plato's line have maintained the spirituality of the human soul, while not seeing its substantial union with the body. This has led to a false vision of man.

St. Thomas says that the human soul is united to the body as its substantial form because the two conditions required for the union of form with matter are both fulfilled in the case of man. These two conditions are:

- (i) That the form be the principle of the substantial being of the

matter: the material thing has to be what it is by virtue of the form that it has. In the case of man, what makes him a real man (including his body) is that he is intelligent and free. In other words, it is not the matter that makes him to be what he is, but something else, namely the form.

(ii) That the form and the matter have a common and single *esse*. In the case of man, the soul communicates its own *esse* to the body without depending on the body for its own subsistence: the result is a single substance with a single *esse*, so that the compound of body and soul exists through the form.

The “excess” of actuality of the soul over the body does not prevent their substantial union, but rather makes it more intense, since the nobler or perfect the form, the more organizing capacity it has over matter.

Since the spiritual soul is the form of the body, it is individuated or concretized by the body that receives it (cf. [ch. 15, c](#)). Human souls (created directly by God: cf. [ch. 24, e](#)) are, therefore, not “mass-produced” or all the same, but created *for* their respective bodies, and thus differentiated, unique and unrepeatable. When separated from the body at death, they continue to be the souls of this or that body and preserve their individuality.

“Reincarnation” is thus ruled out as absurd. In fact, it is a dogma of the Christian faith that *we live only once* (cf. Hebrews 9:27). Belief in reincarnation is mere wishful thinking, perhaps based on the hope that “there will be another chance”. But if we don’t take our chance now, we are lost: we must sanctify ourselves *now*, without waiting for another life or “another chance”.

And the body must play its part in the spiritual perfection of man, since it is part of his being: it shares the dignity of the human person rooted in his spirituality.

c. The spiritual perfection of man

Man is a creature astride pure spirit and simple material life (see [ch. 25, e](#)). In him the entire universe is represented since he is both material and spiritual. While the human soul is the lowest of the spiritual forms, the human body is the most noble and perfect body of the material universe because of its spiritual principle.

Spiritual being is more perfect than material being (cf. [ch 25, c](#)). But does this mean that material being is evil? This is another metaphysical error, since *all* being is good, as we have seen. Material being is simply less perfect than spiritual being, more limited, more

potential. Thus, due to the limitation of the body, the human soul has the perfections of pure spirits but only participated, i.e. in a lower degree. For example, while the intelligence of the angels is pure intellect, the intelligence of man is more "reason" than intellect (see [ch. 28, d](#)).

The spiritual creature is placed at the summit of the universe and directly related to God. In this lies his dignity: that he or she can know and love God directly. The spiritual creature can transcend the created world through his spiritual activity, namely knowing and loving God, albeit in an imperfect manner. Only God can fully satisfy created intelligence and will as Total Truth and Total Goodness. He is then the last end of all human activity: the dignity of man lies in being God-oriented, and this is the basis for his inalienable right to worship God, for his religious freedom.

d. Origin of the human soul

The human soul cannot come from the body, because this would imply a total lack of proportion between the cause and the effect (cf. [ch. 15, b](#)). The being of the soul, as we have seen, is of a higher degree of perfection than the being of the body. It cannot, therefore, come from it as from an efficient cause.

Nor can spiritual souls be produced by the souls of parents, since by the fact of being spiritual they are simple, i.e. they cannot split themselves to produce another soul: only matter has parts outside parts (quantity) that can break apart.

Consequently, every human soul is, as we have seen, a direct creation by God, and it is infused into the human body generated by the parents. This divine action is "natural", i.e. not a "miracle", since it takes place according to the laws of nature. The human body proceeds from the parents by generation: they transmit human nature in its material part, thus preparing it for the reception of the soul from God. Three persons then intervene in the begetting of a human being: the man, the woman and God. That is why human generation is called *procreation*: the Creator intervenes directly. And that is why marriage has always been regarded as an essentially religious institution.

This is the source of the nobility and dignity of the spiritual perfection of man: that the human soul comes directly from God, and then, through its specific operation of knowing and loving, it can reach God directly.

e. Immortality of the human soul

When a form depends on its matter in its *becoming*, in its *being*, and in its *activity*, it ceases *to be* when the body is *corrupted* or broken down. This is the case with the souls of animals and plants (soul = principle of life). What makes plants and animals living beings is not “matter”, since this is what they have in common with non-living things, but a substantial form (principle of life) with certain functions which non-living beings lack. But these “souls” of plants and animals depend entirely on their bodies. So, when these break down, they cease to be.

On the other hand, as we have seen, the spiritual soul of man does not have this complete dependence on the body, and so it is immortal by virtue of its own subsistence. In the same way as it has come to be by creation, it can only cease to be by annihilation; but in itself it is naturally immortal.

However, the separated soul of man has an activity which is different, since, as we have seen in [ch. 30](#), e, it is then confronted with the perfect and clear vision of God, and therefore its will is forever joined to God if that was its last

choice. Nevertheless, it retains a sort of aptitude or natural inclination to be reunited with the body, since both had made up a single substance or “species” (specific essence). We know from our Christian faith that there will be a resurrection of the body, and it is a reasonable belief (although we cannot strictly prove it by reason alone) due to this natural inclination of the separated soul.

CHAPTER 26

Intelligence

a. Overview

It is obvious that man knows things much better than animals. He discovers the purpose of things. He shows the ability to know the *end* of things: what they *are for*. Then he reasons and draws consequences as to the use of means to attain ends. Thus he develops agriculture, animal husbandry, industry, commerce, banking, engineering, architecture, medicine, cooking, ceramics, tailoring, shoe-making... These are manifestations of a more profound, more comprehensive type of knowledge, obviously higher than that of animals. This is what we call intelligence.

Intelligence is expressed typically through *speech*. Animals utter sounds which express emotions, but speech is a system of *articulate* sounds which express not only feelings but also ideas. Animals have no capacity to articulate: they only have feelings and emotions. Man also has them, but they are supposed to be ruled by the intelligence, if man is to take his place above the animals. And the intelligence acts, as we shall see, by forming concepts or ideas, making judgments, and deducing consequences, whereby man acts upon reality with a free will.

b. Nature and object of the intelligence

In order to discover the nature of the intelligence, we have to look at its *object*, and here again we can distinguish the material object and the formal object. The material object of sight, for example, is whatever is visible; but its formal object is the light, without which we would not see anything. The material object of the intelligence is everything, because the intelligence looks at everything. But what is its formal object? What is the “light” of the intelligence? This can be gleaned from the questions asked by the intelligence: what *is* this? what *is* it for? what does it come from? “Being” is then the formal object of the intelligence (see [ch. 6](#), [c](#), and [9](#), [c](#)).

While the senses focus on sensible qualities, the intelligence wants to know what things *are* in themselves. Through those questions the intelligence wants to find out (i) *what* things are (essence), and (ii) *that* things are (act of being).

St. Thomas says that the first thing that enters into the intellect is *ens*, i.e. the subject or holder of the act of being: this is the formal object of the intelligence (see [ch. 11, b](#)). When the intelligence pursues this object in a scientific way, it enters into metaphysics. Metaphysics is then the most natural development and activity of the intelligence, but due to its depth and comprehensiveness, and to the distractions of feelings and emotions, man can easily get side-tracked or discouraged in its pursuit. But it is most natural to him, as well as the scientific bent (cf. [ch. 8, b](#)).

The object of intelligence in general is “being”, but more specifically in the earthly state of union of body and soul the object of the intelligence is the being of *material* things as known through the *senses*, because the intelligence of man is *in* the body and it reaches reality *through* the body. This does not mean, however, that “material being” is the *only* object of the intelligence in union with the body, because the intelligence can go beyond it, albeit keeping it as its point of reference.

Nevertheless, the intelligence is a *spiritual* power, and it is very important to grasp this. Let us see why. A form is individualized by matter (as we saw in [ch. 15, c](#)). Matter makes a thing this one and not that one. Form is what makes a thing to be *what* it is. The human form is individualized in each one of us by our matter: my body is here and your body is there, and they cannot be in more than one place at a time. The body is not something “general”, but very individual. Nevertheless it is what we have in common with all other material things, and so it is not what makes us specifically “men”. This is the role of the “form”, which in our case is the spiritual soul. Why “spiritual”? Because it performs an operation whose object is *universal* (the opposite of “individual”), namely the universal concept, product of the intelligence. What is material cannot be “one in many” as the universal is: the essence of “bird”, expressed in the concept of “bird”, is one, and still it is multiplied in many birds. This shows a *complete independence from material conditions*, a complete immateriality, which is what we call spirituality. The “form” of the animal is immaterial, but not “spiritual” since it is bound to matter, while the “form” of man is not only immaterial but spiritual, since it is completely independent from matter (see [ch. 31](#), and [ch. 14, b](#)). As we shall see, the immortality of the human soul derives from its spirituality and consequent simplicity.

A second proof of the spirituality of the human soul is the power of *reflection* of both the intelligence and the will, i.e. the fact that they can literally return upon themselves (the intelligence can understand its own understanding, and the will can will its own willing), which is completely impossible for material things: the eye cannot see its own

seeing, unless it is reflected outside itself.

And another proof is the way the intelligence abstracts the essences of things by precisely seizing what is *permanent* in them, i.e. completely trans-sensibly or beyond matter altogether (since matter is the principle of *change*) (see [ch. 6, e](#)).

However, even though these operations reveal the spiritual nature of the intelligence, i.e. a complete independence from matter, nevertheless, due to the *substantial* union of body and soul, the *appropriate* or proportionate object of the intelligence in this earthly life is the *being of material things*. It is the sensible powers, with their bodily organs, that supply the raw materials of knowledge to the intelligence. If the senses are defective, therefore, the intelligence is handicapped. This is very important for the philosophy of education: an optimum development of sensibility in the child gives rise to a good intelligence, and one has to go always from the concrete to the abstract, not the other way round.

c. Process of understanding

This process includes three operations:

(i) *Simple apprehension*: looking at the essences of things, grasping *what* they are.

(ii) *Judgment*: making statements (affirmations or negations) about them.

(iii) *Reasoning*: drawing conclusions from those statements (cf. [ch. 8, d](#); [9, b](#)).

This can be seen in the way the intelligence, as a potency is brought into act: the intelligence is actuated when it enters into contact with reality, namely by “being”. This means that, contrary to the trend of modern philosophy, which we mentioned in the previous chapter, “being” is prior to human thought: it encompasses it and *actuates* and activates it. The truth in the mind is the *effect* of the truth of being.

Now, due to its imperfection, the human intelligence needs several operations to actuate itself, i.e. to know the truth. Truth, as we saw, is the “agreement of the mind with reality”, and it is expressed in the judgment. The judgment is then, the crowning product of the mind, the *act* of understanding. It is arrived at either by simple apprehension or by reasoning, and it characterizes human behavior: acting by judgment is called *prudence* (*recta ratio agibilium*, the rational way of doing things), as distinct from acting by feeling or emotional impulse. The judgment is both an *indivisible* act of the mind, and *composed* of more simple elements: this also reveals both the perfection and the

imperfection of the human intelligence.

Let us now take a closer look at these two operations, or which all our *reasoning* depends, as they keep us in touch with reality.

CHAPTER 14

Potency and Act

a. Simplicity of these concepts, gathered from the experience of change

The concepts of potency and act are not “obsolete”. They are simple concepts which anybody can form in any climate or culture. The moment we look at things in the material sensible world, we see change and motion. This experience of change and motion implies the truth of the principle of non-contradiction, as we have discussed, because if *to be here* means the same as *to be there*, then there is no motion. As already observed, it is not surprising that Marxism denies the principle of non-contradiction, because for Marxism there is no such thing as *being*, but only *becoming* or process.

There are things which are capable of becoming other things: this table has the capacity of being made into a chair, but not that of being made into a man. Things have *real* capacities, really rooted in their being. Potency is indeed something *real*, though not actual. We call potency or potentiality that which *can* be something but is not yet; and we call act that which is already. The passage from the potency to the corresponding act is called motion or change.

b. Motion as passage from potency to act

The realities of motion and act are direct immediate notions, and cannot, therefore, be “demonstrated” or proven, since they are directly evident to the intelligence. This analysis of motion was made by Aristotle. He defined motion as *the act of a being in potency in so far as it is still in potency*.

The first thing we observe is that motion is an act, because it is a reality and every reality is an act, something that is there. However, it is not a perfect act, because if it were perfect, it would no longer be motion. Thus, motion is more perfect than potency, but less perfect than act: it can always become better.

Motion may be understood in two ways:

(i) a change from one subject to *another*: a change of substance, a substance becoming another substance; a new substance is *generated*, as another one is *corrupted*;

(ii) a change from a subject *in a certain stage* to the *same* subject *in another stage*: if this happens with regard to *place*, it is called *local motion*; if with regard to *quantity*, it is called *increase* or *decrease*; if with regard to *quality*, the name is *alteration*.

It is from motion that we extract the first meaning of potency and act. But when we observe more carefully the operations of *living beings* and, more specifically, the spiritual operations of *understanding* and *choosing*, our concept of potency and act is enriched and deepened.

Let us look, for example, at the operation of living beings which consists in acquiring sensible forms and making them their own (cognition): when a dog looks at a bone, the bone does not penetrate into the dog, but its sensible *form* has entered into his consciousness. The dog has thereby made that sensible form his own, and no one can take it away from him. That sensible form has come to enhance the *being* of the dog, who *is* now *more* than before: it has increased the *actuality* of his being. Here we see an actuality which is more than just passing from potency to act. It is a new type of actuality, which is not physical. There is an increase of his being, an increase of actuality, but not material: therefore, it must be immaterial.

This *immateriality*, which implies an actuality detached from matter, is therefore the root of cognition or *knowing*, even of purely sensible perception (animal). Thus, “to know” means *to acquire other forms immaterially*. Even at the purely sensible level, knowledge is perfectly immaterial, because when material things, as material, acquire another form, they have to lose their own: if we want to give this table the form of a chair, it can no longer be a table; but animals acquire forms without losing their own. This “being” of the form *in* the knower is not physical but immaterial, and it is called *intentional* being (from Latin *intendere* = to point to): it is the being acquired by forms in the knower (which *point to* those forms outside the knower), whether this knower is an animal or a man (human knowledge, however, is not only immaterial but *spiritual*, as we shall see below, in metaphysics of man).

In human knowledge, we can distinguish two levels of potency and act which further refine our notion of potency and act: (i) the passage from not knowing to knowing, e.g. from not being a medical doctor to being one; and (ii) the passage from a knowledge possessed as a *habit*, to an *actual* consideration, e.g. from being a medical doctor but not actually practicing here and now, to actual practice.

c. Other metaphysical insights of potency and act

As we saw, metaphysics is not a process of deduction starting from definitions. In metaphysics, we start with reality, and keep observing, noticing, and writing down our observations. We may make deductions, but always from reality: the *principle* in this case is always reality.

Now, from what we have seen, act and potency divide created being, because every finite being is really composed of potency and act. We said that the *act of being* is *act*, and therefore the *essence* is *potency*. This is then the fundamental composition of finite being: potency and act.

This means that all finite beings are *perfectible*: they can become always better, because as long as they still have potency they can actualize it. We can always increase our being, if not materially, immaterially, by knowing, and here there is no limit: wisdom is the perfection of knowledge. The same thing happens when we empower our will with virtues. Thus, by knowing, willing and doing we can increase our being indefinitely with new actualities.

Accidents are necessary for a finite substance, as we have also seen, specifically the accident of action, activity. The will, through action, pursues the good, perfects itself, and this is virtue, although knowledge has to enter into it as well, and thus the intelligence. Through these two spiritual powers, man has an indefinite capacity to perfect himself. Man is only limited by his material condition. Matter is tremendously limited, but spirit has the capacity for indefinite progress. God has created us in His image and likeness, in that He has given us the tendency towards *pure act*, perfect act, which is Himself.

Another insight is that actuality of being implies perfection of reality, because it implies no limits, which means that limitation or imperfection comes from potency, although also perfectibility. That is why pure act is unlimited perfection, which is what God's being is. Act can only be limited by potency: by the potency in which it is received. I am no more than what I can be. The "can be" limits the "is". Therefore, a person is more perfect, the more actual he is, because potency is the limiting principle.

Lastly, the distinction between potency and act is *real*, not just conceptual or logical: one cannot be the other in the same sense. That is why we can see that there is a *real* composition in finite being of *essence* and the *act of being*, and in this creatures differ fundamentally from the Creator, since He is pure act, without any kind of composition. God is absolutely *simple*, while creatures are *composite* (in many ways): this is the *radical* difference.

CHAPTER 24

Divine Operation

a. God is personal

We have seen that between the divine *esse* and the divine essence there is perfect identity. Therefore, there is a perfect identity of all the perfections of God with His essence. We also said that we can attribute the perfections of creatures to God, but once we have “purified” them: we cannot apply to Him, for example, the perfection of materiality.

Can we apply to God the perfection of “life”? Yes, as long as we purify it from “sensitivity”, since sensitivity is matter-bound: that leaves the “spiritual” life of intelligence and freedom, which corresponds to what we call the “person”. In fact, this type of life is the most perfect since it involves the highest degree of *immanence* (see [ch. 14, b](#), and [17, e](#)). There is nothing more perfect in the universe than to understand and to will freely, i.e. to be a person. God is, then, a “He”, not an “It”, i.e. Someone who understands and loves infinitely.

b. Divine knowledge

The logical sequence will be to examine (i) divine knowledge; (ii) divine will; (iii) divine activity; since our topic is divine operation, but divine operation assumes a divine will and a divine intelligence, as directing operation to an end.

What can we know about divine *knowledge*? First of all, God's intelligence is infinite. What is the appropriate object of intelligence? Being (see [ch. 9, c](#)). But what is the object of *divine* intelligence? It must be “infinite being”, namely Himself.

We can say, therefore, that God knows Himself *comprehensively*, i.e. leaving nothing out of His knowledge (in contrast with *our* knowledge, which is never comprehensive to that extent). And this divine knowledge is identical with His Being.

Now, by knowing Himself, God knows all His creatures *in their first cause*. This is why His knowledge of creatures infinitely surpasses any created knowledge. Intelligent creatures know by going from the effect to the cause (science is the knowledge of causes, as we said). But God knows His creatures in their ultimate cause, because He *is* their ultimate cause. He knows them, therefore, infinitely better than

they know themselves. Hence the need to be *absolutely sincere* with God, because He knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves: we cannot escape His gaze. This is called “omniscience”, which means that God knows everything.

c. Divine will: God is Love

The will, as we shall see in [ch. 29](#), is the power of tending towards good, the inclination to the good. This inclination is what is called *love*: that is why we said in the previous chapter that “love comes from the will”.

We can say that God wills and loves, because the will follows the intelligence. And just as the understanding of God is identical with His Being, His willing or loving is also identical with His Being. And therefore, the will of God is *not* just a tendency to the good, since He cannot tend to something *better* than Himself, but the *infinitely loving possession of goodness itself*.

Since there is a perfect identity of the Being of God with His willing and loving, *God is Love*, which is in fact what the Bible says (cf. 1 Jn. 4:7-16).

And what is the proportionate object of His love? Himself, because He is the supreme goodness. He infinitely loves the infinitely lovable object: the infinite goodness which is Himself. And as we said about divine knowledge (that He knows Himself comprehensively, and by knowing Himself He knows His creatures), we can say about divine love that God loves Himself perfectly and absolutely, and by loving Himself He loves His creatures.

God's love for His creatures, however, is a pure love of *benevolence*: if He creates, it is without compulsion, out of the abundance of His goodness (see [ch. 16, c](#), and [ch. 24, g](#)). He has all the perfection of being: He does not *need* anything. His love for us is thus pure benevolence (*bene-volo* = to wish well): without any self-interest or compensation; sheer self-giving, without any receiving. (This is, by the way, the type of love *commanded* by Christ for His disciples to have for one another: cf. Jn. 13:34-35).

d. Divine omnipotence

The power of God, the “active potency” of God, is *almighty* or omnipotent, since there is no limit to His Being, and His activity is identical with It.

Omne agens agit sibi simile: “every agent produces an effect

similar to itself". The type of production of an agent bears the imprint or stamp of the producer. A thing acts according to its nature (cf. [ch. 17, c](#)), and what it produces is similar to itself in some way.

Now, God is the infinite Being in whom the perfection of every being is contained in the highest degree. Therefore, we can say that His power is almighty: *He can do everything possible* (it is pointless to ask whether He can do something impossible, like a square circle, since what is impossible *can not* be done). And His greatest act of omnipotence is the forgiveness of the repentant sinner, given the infinite malice of the offense to God.

e. God as creator

God is the *efficient cause* of the universe (see [ch. 18, d](#)). The efficient cause is that which makes the effect *be* or *become*, while the formal cause makes the effect to be *what it is*. The latter points to the essence, while the former points to the *esse*. The formal cause is on the predicamental level, while the efficient cause is more on the transcendental level of being (see [ch. 16, b](#)).

God is the cause of the being or *esse* of everything. Why? Because whatever *esse* is participated must be caused by the *Esse* which is by essence, as we saw in the Third Way ([ch. 22, d](#)).

To create is *proper* and *exclusive* of God, since "to create" means to give the *esse*. Every being acts according to its nature (cf. [ch. 16, d](#)); but the nature of God is *to be*. Therefore, in this: case no *instrumental* cause is possible: God does not create through instruments, because nothing else can give *esse*, apart from God.

In other words, if His activity *goes out* of Himself (we are: not talking of the intra-divine activities, like the "Trinitarian: processions"), this activity consists in making things *be*: only, He *is* being, and so only He can *give* being. Other things are not being: they only *have* being. Therefore, whatever exists, is there because God makes it *be*. Does the carpenter make the table "be"? No. What he does is to make it "come to be" or "become". Only God is "first cause" or author of the "to be": all other causes are "second causes", since they only cause the "becoming" of things (see [ch. 18, d](#)).

In the things below man, the substantial form is always *extracted* from the potentiality of the matter (see [ch. 15, b](#)), and likewise the accidental forms, such as the shape of a table. But in the case of man, his substantial form (what makes him to be man) is his *spiritual* soul, which, as we shall see in the metaphysics of man, implies a manner of being completely above material conditions. It is not, therefore, in the potentiality of matter. Consequently, every time a

man comes into being, God creates his soul and infuses it into the body, which means that as far as his soul is concerned, man has not evolved from animals.

f. God's presence everywhere

That God is what makes things *be*, means that He not only has created the universe at the beginning, but is *preserving* it in being from moment to moment. God's creation, the creation of the world, has to be distinguished on our part from the *preservation* of all creatures in being, which also comes from God.

There is a very important consequence of this (one of the most important of all): if He is preserving the being of everything all the time, *He must be intimately present to everything all the time. Why?* Because in God, as we said, activity and being are identical; therefore, wherever He *acts*, there He *is*. In our case, activity and being (accident and substance) are not identical, and that is why we may have our activity in some place and our being in another (I may be acting upon somebody, e.g. by speaking to him, but this does not mean that I *am* in him: my activity is distinct from my being). But that is not the case with God: wherever He acts, there He is. This means that if God were to remove His presence, things would be annihilated, they would fall back into nothingness. We can conclude, therefore, as St. Thomas does, that *God is in all things*:

(i) *by essence*, because He preserves them in being by Himself;

(ii) *by power*, because He directs them and acts upon them;

(iii) *by presence*, because wherever He acts, there He is.

Thus, the presence of God, His immensity, as we saw above, is all-pervasive: God is everywhere, by His activity in the world, on all things. This is very relevant for our trying *to live* in the presence of God: knowing that we are in the presence of God, and that God loves us with an infinite love, we feel the need to be good, as He is.

Remember also, however, the *transcendence* of God, as explained in [ch. 23, c.](#)

g. Divine freedom and providence

Summing up, God creates the world *freely*, not by necessity, because the divine action *as creative* is identical with His will with regard to the world. And this Will is free. Why? Because He does not

need anything, since He is the perfect Being: creation is thus the overflow of His goodness and love.

In relation to this, the last point concerning the causality of God is *divine providence*. “To provide” means to *foresee* the future and *supply* what is needed for it. God is “provident” with His creatures in that He gives them what they need in order to attain their end. For instance, He gives us our intelligence and our will, and all our bodily powers, for us to supply our needs and thus reach our goal.

In other words, God *governs* His creatures. “To govern” means to direct things *to their end*. But He directs His creatures *in accordance with their nature*, since every being acts according to its nature. Therefore, God directs men to their end *respecting their freedom*, since this is their nature.

This truth is, like all divine things, full of mystery. It is indeed mysterious how God can direct someone respecting his freedom at the same time. We do know, however, that God directs us to our end, and that we are free, and thus perfectly responsible for all that we do. The rest is mysterious.

Divine government (directing to the end, but respecting freedom) is the model for all those who share in it, i.e. those who share the *authority* of God: religious authorities, parental authorities, civil authorities, academic authorities... The model is the *principle of subsidiarity*, whereby what can be done by the smaller body should not be done by the bigger one: the child must be taught how to walk, so that he can do it by himself, without overprotection. (See [ch. 33, f](#), and [38, b](#))

CHAPTER 17

The Activity of Created Being

a. “Esse” and nature as principles of activity

The activities of a being come from both the act of being and the essence, since the act of being is always limited or participated by the essence. The *esse* and the nature of the being are the principles of its activity: (i) a thing cannot act unless it *is*; (ii) a thing acts only according to its being or nature. “Nature” is the essence of the thing as *principle of the operations proper or specific to it* (cf. [ch. 15, a](#)).

The operation, then, comes from the subsistent subject *through* the nature and the *esse* which acts. In the case of man, for instance, the person is the one that acts, but his activity is rational on account of his nature; thus, while the person is the principle *as such* (that which,) the nature is the principle *whereby* (that by which) the person acts.

With regard to the act of being, the operation is *second*, because it cannot be without the act of being, which is therefore *first*. But in the formal order (or the essence), the nature is the first act. Both the form and the nature are potency with regard to *esse*.

In the formal order, activity comes from nature: everything acts according to its nature. Both of them, however, nature and activity are potencies with regard to *esse*, since neither of them can be without the *esse*. Take as an example a man (nature) in potency to act like an engineer (activity). How do those two potencies pass into act? When receiving the *esse*: first when he becomes an engineer, and then when he acts like one. In both cases there is a passage from potency to act: from the potency of being an engineer to the act of being one; from the potency of acting to the actual acting.

b. Application to the value of human life

A very important consequence is that a being acts *because* it is, not vice versa. Sometimes, the practice of abortion is defended on the grounds that the baby in its mother's womb is not a person, since it is not *acting* as a person, as if the activity were what determines the being, when in fact it is the other way round. That argument to eliminate the fetus could also be used to justify the elimination of anyone purportedly not behaving like a person, such as the feeble-minded, the mentally retarded and the senile. It is a tragic

metaphysical confusion. Even if a person is not acting as a person, for whatever reason, he or she still retains his dignity and his rights because he or she *is* still a person. Human life or humanity is *being*-human, not necessarily acting-human. It is the person that acts *because he is*, and what makes him a person is *not* that he acts like one, but that he *is* a person of a rational *nature*. The *modus operandi* follows the *modus essendi*: people *act* as what they *are*.

c. Beings act according to their nature

Another corollary is that a being can act (i) either *according to* its specific nature, or (ii) *below* its specific nature; but never *beyond* the powers of its nature.

This is very important to understand the supernatural life of grace, wherein man is given powers *above* his nature to reach effects which he cannot attain by his own nature. Grace is a gift from God that empowers man to go *beyond* his nature. This is what is called the *elevation* of nature by grace: nature is raised to a position from which it can attain things which it could not by itself, but, of course, being intelligent and free, man has to *cooperate*. Grace empowers man, but man has to cooperate according to those powers. Grace does not remove or destroy nature, but enhances and empowers it. The gift is there, and then it is up to man to act according to it.

d. Activity as the perfection of being: idleness and work

Created beings perfect themselves through their operations. Every created being, due to the real distinction between its being and its activity, needs its activity in order to perfect itself. A being is not what it is because of its activity, but because of its being what it is.

But it is also true that it is by its activity that a being perfects itself. The baby in its mother's womb *is* already a human being, but of course it is extremely imperfect: it has to perfect itself through its activities.

It is by activity that human beings perfect themselves, but by an activity coming from a *rational* nature, an activity which brings potentialities into act which are required for the perfection of the *human* being. Idleness is very bad, since it is “to do nothing”, while being is supposed to do something. So much so that it may be better to do, although not so well, than not to do at all.

Something is perfect to the extent that it is in act. And it is imperfect to the extent that it is still in potency. That is why the ultimate

perfection of being is acquired through activity. Therefore, a being when it comes to be is good because it is, but if it develops through activity the potentialities it is supposed to develop and reaches its perfection, in this perfect state it is much better than at the beginning. In other words, it is better to be better than to be good. And how does one pass from good to better? By activity. That is why work, if it is for the right end, perfects man, while idleness degrades him (see, [ch. 33](#) and [ch. 35, a](#)).

e. Transient and immanent actions

Lastly, there are two types of actions:

(i) Actions which go out of the subject or agent, and thus perfect an object outside the agent. They are called *transient* actions or simply actions. This is actually the predicament or category of *action*, which has a counterpart in the object, namely *passivity* (cf. [ch. 13, c](#)).

(ii) Actions which do not go out of the agent but remain within the agent, thus perfecting the agent itself rather than an object outside; e.g. thinking. They are called *immanent* actions (*in-manere* = to remain in), or also *operations*.

Since the immanent action perfects the substance (the agent), it is a *quality* rather than an “action” (quality is the accident that perfects the substance). In the case of divine operations, however, as we shall see, we distinguish again:

(iii) Actions *ad extra*, i.e. going *out of* God; e.g. Creation.

(iv) Actions *ad intra*, i.e. remaining within God; e.g. the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father.

Of course, neither (i) nor (ii) are accidents, since, as we have seen, there are no accidents in God: these divine operations are identical with His essence, with His being.

CHAPTER 33

Man in the World

a. The social nature of man

It has always been an unquestionable fact that man is “social by nature”: he relates himself to other men with the same naturalness as a fish takes to water. It is enough to just observe how men are from the beginning of their existence, and how they live, to realize that man is entirely dependent on others for everything.

This relating ourselves to others seems to be of our essence therefore. But to be more precise, we must notice that this is not “part of” our essence, but rather a *property* flowing from it. It is a property of the “rational animal”, who, as a result of his nature, transmits his thoughts to others and creates links with them. Marxism states that the essence of man is “to be social”, but this is a gross exaggeration and a metaphysical error: it denies the transcendence of man, as we have just seen.

Aristotle remarks (and St. Thomas agrees wholeheartedly) that “every man feels naturally like a friend to other men”. The natural and spontaneous feeling of man towards other men is friendliness. There are, of course, obvious enmities, but really being unfriendly is like an afterthought, not something “spontaneous”. When we see someone in trouble, we immediately try to help without thinking. The natural spontaneous -tendency of man is to love his fellowmen. Only when he starts thinking he may find reasons for not being friendly. This is a fact to be found in all cultures: it proves very strikingly the social nature of man.

It is then natural and spontaneous for men to form societies: there is no need for an *explicit* compact or contract, as stated by “social contract” theories. The danger of those theories is the implication that the authority to govern society comes from the people, which is only half-true. All authority comes from God, since *no man is by nature superior to others*. Therefore, only God can give the authority to govern: only God can make a man “superior” by giving him the authority to govern, although the people may choose the holders of authority and, in this sense, transfer the power to the rulers. People just come together, and they may elect the authorities depending on the various systems of government. But they naturally tend to come together, form a society, and accept some form of authority (see [ch. 40](#)).

And as for the motives, people come together to satisfy their needs, to help one another, to improve, to become better, to attain their end. We can say that the *end*, purpose or goal of society is *the good of every man in that society*. This is what is called the “common good”, “common” because it is for *every* man, not just for the majority (see ethics).

b. Natural societies

As distinct from “artificial” or voluntary societies, such as a university or a business corporation, “natural” societies are those which arise spontaneously, without any new inclination of the will (cf. [ch. 29, d](#)). These are (i) the family, and (ii) civil society.

It is true, of course, that the family arises from an act of the will between the two spouses, and that there is a contract involved in marriage, but the *tendency* to come together is entirely “natural”: a man does not have to make an explicit act of the will to feel inclined to live in society or to have a family.

The family and civil society are, therefore, the most basic and necessary societies for human activity and human development.

c. Man and history

“History” is a Greek word which means “chronicle” or recording of past events. It has a reference to happenings in time, but more specifically to time *in the life of man*. Only man takes the trouble of recording what happens to him, because he considers it significant for the decisions he has to make in the present, as well as for planning his future. History is thus a specific human phenomenon flowing from the rationality of man: “History is the teacher of life”, said the ancients (*Historia magistra vitae*). But since man has both a personal dimension and a social dimension we can speak of two types of history:

(i) *History of a person*: the life of a person, a biography, a personal history, which can also be related to the history of mankind as a whole. A very interesting thing to notice here is that while the body of man, being material, is subject to decay and corruption, we observe in the biographies of men that the soul, on the other hand, can actually become more mature and perfect with the passage of time, if it is cultivated. This shows that the human soul is spiritual, since it does not follow the usual material graph, which goes up until it reaches the peak and then goes down inevitably. As we have seen, there are many

signs of the spirituality of the human soul, and this is one of them.

(ii) *Social history*: the life of societies, nations, countries, or certain human activities, such as arts, culture, sciences, etc. These histories are the result of the social nature of man: they arise from the fact that some persons have come together to reach a certain end, and in the pursuit of that end a collective history has arisen.

History as a science made great strides in the 18th century, with the result that, by the 19th, there were some philosophies which gave history a central position. They reached a point where they claimed to have discovered the “laws” of history whereby, they said, man could be studied “historically” with the same accuracy as natural or physical phenomena. According to Marx, for example, there are certain “laws” inherent to matter which determine the course of history (see [ch. 30, c](#)): but this is metaphysical nonsense, since *laws are not efficient causes*; they don't cause anything, but only reflect the *tendency towards the final cause*. In order to cause, efficiently, we need a real substance to act: only the individual substance is in act (cf. [ch. 16, d](#)). Laws are not substances but merely graphs of tendencies, indications that something is ordained to a certain end, and this ordination, in so far as it exists, is only an accident, because it exists *in* things.

What is then the efficient or agent cause of history? We have said that history is the development of human events, i.e. events where man is involved. But man is free and responsible for his actions. This is then the cause of history: *persons with their free activity*. Consequently, historical processes are essentially different from physical processes, since the latter are subject to *necessary laws*, while the former depend on the free will of men: they are not predetermined, but largely unpredictable.

Where man is involved with his free activity, any “law” we may speak about has to be *hypothetical*, i.e. starting with “if”. Thus, *if* men, for example, invent something which will improve agriculture or medicine, we call it “progress”, and if they transmit it to posterity we call it “tradition”. Both progress and tradition are good, but because of the freedom of man, men may choose to destroy the goods or values they have achieved, and so go backward. If man pursues the good, there is progress, and tradition is creative; but if he fails to do so, there is retrogression, and tradition crumbles. History does not show a constant pattern of progress, nor does it show a constant pattern of decadence. It depends on factors, but the freedom of man is always involved.

d. Human work

“Work” is another typical human phenomenon flowing from human nature. Only man works intelligently, i.e. to achieve certain ends. Animals “work” only when directed by men: aside from that, they merely “act” driven by instinctive feelings to satisfy their needs.

Broadly speaking, we can say that “work” is equivalent to “activity”. However, there is a distinction between work (e.g.; manufacturing clothes or watches) and *leisure* (e.g. listening to; a symphony or reading a poem); and leisure is not lack of activity. Lack of activity is *idleness* (see [ch. 17,d](#)). The activity involved in work requires certain effort or toil and a temporal process.

Of course, broadly speaking one can say that work is roughly the same as activity, and there is some measure of work involved in leisure. But the distinction of work and leisure is still valid. That is why we can find a more precise meaning of work, a more metaphysical definition by regarding it as *a human action which consists in producing something*, i.e. giving a certain *perfection* to a being which it did not have before (“perfection” comes from the Latin *per-ficere* = to make something completely; *facere* = to make; *agere* = to do).

The distinction between *agere* and *facere* is relevant here. *Agere* has a moral implication (“activity” derives from this verb), the moral implication of human work: its motivation in relation to the last end. *Facere*, on the other hand, is the actual making, the production. In this sense, in so far as it is performed by an active potency, whether intellectual or physical, work perfects both the “object” and the “subject” or agent, since in both cases there is an actualization of potentiality. This perfection resulting from *facere* is, however, only a *relative perfection*, relative to the work itself only. Thus, carpentry for example makes a man a better carpenter, but not necessarily a better man.

On the other hand, when we join the *facere* to the *agere*, i.e. when we consider the *motivation* of the work, which is the end for the sake of which the work is done, then the perfection which work brings to the agent is an *absolute perfection*, since it affects the entire being of the agent to the extent that it brings him closer to his last end.

e. The sanctification of work

Work, then, perfects man, “sanctifies” man, so long as (i) it is done for God (last end), and (ii) it is done with *technical* perfection (see [ch. 34, d](#)). These two things must go together in order “to sanctify work, be sanctified by work, and sanctify others through work”, in the well-known formula of Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer. Both the *agere* and

the *facere* have to be taken into account: *agere* refers to the motivation, and *facere* to the perfection of the work itself.

This is the significance of Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer: that he institutionalized this principle. This theology of work, deeply rooted in the Bible (“God made man... to work”, we read at the beginning of Genesis), and deeply human as a philosophy based on the meaning of *agere* and *facere* (explained by St. Thomas Aquinas), had never been put into practice in an institution. Opus Dei, founded by Msgr. Escrivá in 1928 exists precisely for this purpose: to put into practice the sanctification of work, and thus to show how work can sanctify or become an instrument of *sanctity*, and how therefore it is the natural environment for *apostolate*, and specifically for the apostolate of the laity, as the II Vatican Council has ratified (see quotation in Foreword).

Work or labor is the activity of man whereby he perfects other beings *by relating them to the end of man*, which is the love of God and neighbor. Therefore, what distinguishes human work is not only the fact of perfecting another being, since this happens also in physical and biological processes: the peculiarity of human work is that it flows from the human intelligence and will, so that man imprints his own stamp on the things outside himself, and thus brings them up to his own level. In this sense, he spiritualizes them.

f. Participation in divine action

Man spiritualizes things by working on them. But we can also see human work as a participation in divine action, i.e. as the result of the *active potency* of man in relation to other beings: man truly acts as “second cause”; his activity is real. As we saw in [ch. 18, d](#); [29, f](#), and [30, g](#), “first” or primary cause is that which brings about the “being” of the effect, while “second” or secondary cause is that which brings about the “becoming” of the effect. When a carpenter makes a table, for example, the “being” (*esse*) of the table comes from God as “first cause”; but in the actual becoming, in the process whereby the table comes into being as a table, it is made by man.

As we saw in [ch. 24, e](#), only God can “create”: man can only *trans-form* or produce as “second cause” (*producere* = to transform something, bringing it from potency to act).

Now, since “good” follows “being” (cf. [ch. 19, e](#)), a thing is as good as its being; but since man is not the creator of being, he is not the creator of good either. So, by “perfecting” or improving things, man does not “create” the good of those things, but rather helps them to reach *their* good, according to the *principle of subsidiarity* (see [ch. 24, g](#), and [38, b](#)). This is how man can help his fellowmen: by bringing

them to move *freely* towards God. But he has a greater mastery, obviously, over non-spiritual creatures than over his fellowmen.

St. Thomas remarks in this respect (*Summa contra gentiles*, III, 112) that God has made this mastery of man over the material universe for three reasons:

(i) That man may know in the material universe the truth that leads to the Creator (see the Five Ways that lead to the existence of God starting from creatures: [ch. 22](#)).

(ii) That man may “keep body and soul together” by acting upon the material universe with his intelligence and will (agriculture and animal husbandry), and thus feeding himself. Only if he uses his spiritual powers, therefore, will he dominate nature.

(iii) That man may partly govern this portion of creation (material nature) by exercising his active potency and his knowledge, thus being the “agent” of divine providence (principle of subsidiarity).

These three reasons highlight the greatness of man and the dignity of the human person.

Catholic Doctrine About Man

In this Part on the metaphysics of man, we have confined ourselves to what philosophy can discover by itself. But if we are Catholics we may want to know which truths of philosophy are actually truths *of our faith*, i.e. not merely philosophical matters.

Why have those matters of faith which can be discovered by philosophy been also *revealed* by God? Because they are difficult to learn by themselves. Not every man can understand these things clearly and well. Therefore, to facilitate the understanding of these matters, so necessary for salvation, God has revealed them explicitly (see [ch. 5, a](#)).

What is then the Catholic doctrine about man? The list below enumerates all the points of doctrine which have been defined by the Catholic Church or are contained in Holy Scripture, and are therefore matters *of faith*. However, we should bear in mind that when saying that they are matters of faith, it is good to show their truth by philosophy alone, particularly for the benefit of those who do not have the Catholic faith(see [ch. 2, c](#)).

1. Supernatural revelation (contents of faith) confirms the most basic truths about man (“natural” revelation: God speaking to man through nature; “supernatural” revelation: God speaking to man directly).

2. The human soul exists; it is personal; it is only one; it is spiritual.

3. The human soul is the “substantial form” of the body, and it is naturally immortal.

4. Man is free.

5. Man can know *by his reason alone* and *with certainty* that his soul is spiritual and immortal, and that he is free.

6. The human soul is directly created by God.

7. The souls of those who have died subsist from their death to the final resurrection of the bodies.

8. The human body is mortal by nature. The bodily immortality of Adam and Eve was “preternatural”. (“Natural”: within the capacity of nature. “Supernatural”: added over and above that capacity. “Preternatural”: surpassing a specific created nature, but not the totality of created nature; thus, immortality was preternatural for man in the state of original justice, but it is “natural” for angels.)

9. At the end of time, all human souls will rejoin their human

bodies forever. These bodies will rise again so as to receive eternal reward or punishment. We saw what St. Thomas said about the resurrection of the body: that reason cannot discover it by itself (cf. [ch. 31, e](#)). This is a truth of faith which is not attainable by mere philosophy, but it does not contradict philosophy: as we said, the soul retains a natural inclination to rejoin its own body.

10. All men descend from a *single* first man, namely the *person* of Adam, and from a *single* first woman, namely the *person* of Eve, both of them directly *formed* by God (“formed”, i.e. made of pre-existing material: God “created” their souls, but “formed” their bodies)

CHAPTER 40

Society and the Common Good

a. Interrelations among men

Thus far, we have studied the ordering of man to the good, especially in [ch. 37](#). Now we have to see the ordering of men towards one another: what is called political (from Greek *polis* = city) philosophy or political science, or also social (from Latin *socius* = fellow) science, social ethics or social philosophy. It is an extension of the metaphysics of the good *to society*, and should not be confused with the *art* of politics (see the difference between “art” and “science” in [ch. 6, c](#); [8, d](#), and [38, f](#)): our concern is not the particular political systems which may exist, but the *principles* that should be enshrined in *all* of them.

The fragmentation of the sciences has spawned a tendency to separate political science from ethics, as well as to separate economics and sociology from ethics. But this is a grave error, because whatever touches on man is primarily ethical, and therefore metaphysical. Not to consider man in relation to his ultimate end gives a distorted view of man (cf. [ch. 8, a](#); [25, c](#); [34, c](#)).

Political philosophy is part of metaphysics: it studies the *being* of society, and specifically the *good* of society. Men have a natural ordination among themselves in order to reach their common good, which is God: from the ordering of every man to the essential good derives the ordination of men to one another, whereby they help one another by communicating the good to one another, which is proper to spiritual beings (it is primarily in the spiritual order that men have to help one another).

The spiritual faculties of man are intelligence and will, as we have seen in the metaphysics of man. With the intelligence, men help one another in acquiring *truth*, in spreading it and dispelling the darkness of error. The will, since its object is the *good*, helps to spread the good to one another through *virtuous behavior*, good example for the sake of others. Thus, the most important goods to be communicated socially are education and good example (in the supernatural order, this spiritual help is called *apostolate*). The opposite is to do evil and to spread error, which is the greatest lack of love for others to the extent that it removes one's will from its ordination to God, and thereby corrupts society as a *union* of men.

b. Friendship and the love of God

The *union of wills* among men is what brings about the ordination of men to one another. Two persons whose wills are united (even though they may differ: “disunity” is not the same as “difference”) are called *friends*.

As we mentioned in [ch. 33, a](#), St. Thomas says (*Contra gentiles*, III, 117), following Aristotle, that men are “naturally” friends. We notice this in the instinctive reaction of a man to help another man in difficulty. This tendency flows from the *natural* ordination of men to one another.

Nevertheless, since activity is required to reach the good end, the *will* has to enter into it. It is not enough to be united in the abstract: men have to be united in practice through their wills, and this is the source of friendship. But wills are united when they all tend to the *common good*: what disrupts and corrupts society is, therefore, the self-will of men who oppose their own will to God's, of those who refuse to forgive, to understand and to care.

We can distinguish two elements of friendship: (i) *wishing* good to the other, and (ii) *doing* good to him. How are they implemented?

We have seen in [ch. 37](#), as well as in natural theology, that one should love God more than one's neighbor, since if one loves someone more than God, then God is no longer the common good. This means also, however, that we should love our neighbor for the love of God: our neighbor can never be our last end. The root of our love for our neighbor is the love of God: this is what makes it solid, lasting, and true. It is what makes a person bear patiently with the defects of one's neighbor. If there is no love of God, what happens is that, since no one is perfect, the defects always stand in the way. If one does not love God above all things, one cannot love anybody else: any “love” then is purely selfish, i.e. “love” with self-interest. But if there is real love of God, love of one's neighbor necessarily follows. The natural tendency to friendship, however, has been damaged by original sin, and that is why men do bad things to one another. In the supernatural order, this natural love of God and neighbor has been raised to the love of Charity, which is far superior to it.

Natural love is directed to the acquisition of *good* (Plato calls this love *eros*, to which Aristotle adds what he calls *philia* or friendship). There is always this element of wanting to *acquire* good in natural love, and this is in itself good. But the supernatural love of Charity goes beyond that: it is rather the Love of God for His creatures (cf. [ch. 24, c](#)), *which God wants to share with His creatures*. Recall the Gospel passage in St. John's (13:34-35),

“... that you may love one another as I have loved you” (the

word used for “love” here in the original Greek is neither *eros* nor *philia*, but *agape*). This makes a big difference: it is neither the love of acquired good nor that of mere fellowship, but the pure love of *giving*. The love of God for His creatures (cf. [ch. 36, b](#), and [37, c](#)) is not in search of some good, because God *is* the Good. Therefore, it is pure self-giving or *benevolence*.

This is the supernatural Charity (*agape*) which Christians are asked to live: giving oneself *without limits*, as God gives Himself. That is why it perfects and transcends the natural love.

c. What is society?

Not every gathering of men is a “society”, but only that in which men are *united for a common end or common good*, for the sake of which they organize themselves.

If we analyze the *causes* (metaphysical analysis) of civil or political society (cf. [ch. 33, b](#)), we find that the first of all the causes in the order of importance is *the final*, i.e. what motivates it (as distinct from the *efficient*, which brings it about): this is the Common Good, namely God as the End of society. Love for the common good is the force that keeps society together. To the extent that this love diminishes, society decomposes or disintegrates: *withdrawing from God leads men to withdraw from one another* (cf. [ch. 37, h](#), and [39, c](#)).

How should the internal order of society be kept, so that it does not disintegrate? Through the right ordering of each person to God as Last End (cf. [ch. 37, h](#)). And how does a person direct himself to the Common Good? Through his will, i.e. through *virtue* (cf. [ch. 39, f](#), and [g](#)). Every person in society should aim at moral perfection by trying to acquire the moral virtues and to communicate them: this is the basic force of cohesion for the being of society. All other goods to be pursued by society (material development, health, education and culture) must be ordained to the moral growth of the persons therein.

The *efficient* cause of society, on the other hand, operates through the free activity of men flowing from the natural inclination of their will. While men are the immediate efficient cause of society, it is ultimately God who has wanted it by creating man *sociable by nature* (cf. [ch. 33, a](#)): there is no need for a formal or explicit “contract” on the part of men to set up a civil society, because it blossoms forth, so to speak, naturally and willingly.

Once it is constituted, society has a *unity of order*, which consists in both (i) an interdependence of all its members, and (ii) a subordination of ranks according to *authority*. The latter is necessarily required in order to *foster and promote the common good by*

coordinating the activities of every one (not because “man is bad by nature “ and needs “to be tamed”, as Machiavelli or Hobbes would say).

Authority, also necessarily, comes ultimately from God, because by nature *all men are equal*, and so, if some are actually placed *above* others in the organization of society, it must be because God has given them that power, since no man has it by nature (cf. [ch. 33, a](#)). Therefore, all authority must be exercised *under God*, i.e. in accordance with the *natural law* (cf. [ch. 33, f](#), and [38, a](#)).

The most important “natural” (as distinct from supernatural) authorities are the *parental* and the *political*, corresponding to the two basic “natural” societies (cf. [ch. 33, b](#)). Other authorities at the service of these in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity (cf. [ch. 38, b](#)) are the *academic* and the *professional*. On the other hand and in a different sense, “supernatural” or religious authority is the highest in the sense that it is most directly related to God, although it should not interfere with “natural” authorities in what is strictly *temporal* and thereby optional.

Inequality in society is therefore natural from an existential point of view. But there is *a basic equality of nature and of destiny* (same origin and same common good), which is the ground of the fundamental and inalienable *rights* which *every man* has.

d. History and culture

The succession of events in time affecting men and societies is called history (cf. [ch. 33, c](#)). Strictly speaking, only the free acts of men constitute history. History in itself is not a “being” or a “substance” (cf. [ch. 13, b](#)), nor is society a “substance”: the individual men (real substances) are the ones who make history and society. Strictly speaking, the expression “history will judge” does not make sense, since history does not *do* anything.

We cannot, therefore, speak of history as moving by “inexorable laws”. As we already said, when men are good there is progress; when they are less good, there is decadence: it depends on what men *decide* to do. That is why we cannot forecast the future of mankind, while we can predict an eclipse of the moon, for example, since it is subject to physical laws which are predictable. In the case of history and society, everything is conjectural and hypothetical regarding the future.

This is the standard to gauge progress in history and culture: the pursuit of the common good, which depends on the free activity of men.

e. Ordering of intermediate societies to civil society

Societies which do not pursue the common good as such, i.e. the good of *all* men, but only a particular good, are naturally subordinated to civil society, i.e. the society concerned with the common good as such.

The family and civil society are “natural” societies, as they aim at the good of man as such (cf. [ch. 33, b](#)). Other societies are, on the other hand, “artificial”, i.e. made voluntarily by men for a particular purpose. The actual form which an organized civil society takes is also “artificial” in this sense.

Patriotism, or the orderly love for one's own civil society, is a virtue, while a “nationalism” which consists in “loving” one's country *to the exclusion of others* is wrong, as it is contrary to the common good as the good of *all* men.

f. Ordering of the person to the common good of society

The personal good has to be referred to the common good, since society is the *means* for the person to attain his perfection. The more intense good is more universal, and so, it is more noble to want to do good to the entire society than to oneself alone, and it is better to want to do good to all societies than to only one. Therefore, the rectitude of the love for a personal good depends on its ordination to the common good. Is it good for me to get a good education? Yes, if it is for the common good, if I can thereby serve society better. Is it good for me to make a retreat so as to improve my spiritual life? Yes, if it will make me a better person to serve others. To similar questions, the answer is yes, if it helps or is directed to the common good (cf. [ch. 37, h](#)).

On the other hand, whoever prefers his own good (egoism) to any other good, in a certain sense becomes like an animal, because it is proper to the animal to seek its own individual good without the desire to transcend it, as is proper to the spiritual creature. The person has to ordain himself to the common good of society, but understanding this as ultimately ordained to the Common Good which transcends society, which is God: when the good of society is not subordinated to God, then sin enters into society.

The subordination to the rulers and to the laws of the land is due only in so far as they are related to the natural law and thereby to the Will of God. In case of conflict, all other things being equal, the

common good must be preferred to the personal good, even if this demands sacrifice. But we cannot do something evil to a person, even for the sake of the collectivity, unless it is a case of self-defense.

However, strictly speaking, a real moral conflict between a personal good and the common good arises only in a society which is not ordered: where either the common good or the personal good are misconceived. If every part of society is ordered to God, no conflict arises: only if one of those parts wants its own good *in a disorderly way* does conflict arise. If this happens, the damage occurs both in the parts and in the totality, and the more influential the part, the greater is the damage to the totality. That is why the egoism of someone in authority is all the more damaging and has more far-reaching effects. If there is disorder in relation to the common good, order must be restored by the legitimate authority by means of measures restricting a particular good for the sake of the common good.

If the authority acts against the common good, it is necessary to *resist* the authority. But *how* to resist this type of authority is another matter. *Physical violence* can only be justifiable in *very extreme cases*, as it usually creates more problems than it solves. As a rule, *passive resistance* should be employed, i.e. refusal to obey the unjust laws or rulings.

The person, as distinct from society, has a direct ordination to God (cf. [ch. 32, c](#), and [37, b](#)). The person exists by himself (substance) and is immortal, because God loves him for his own sake and not in relation to another being, as He loves animals for instance. The *esse* of the person is thus directly related to the Subsistent *Esse* of God. All the material creatures are ordained to the spiritual creatures, and each person is ordained to the good of his own species and to the good of society *not in his entire being*, but only in so far as this will lead him to God. All forms of materialism, by rejecting the spirituality and immortality of the human soul, tend to see the *individual as a mere instrument of the species*, and thus they introduce population control programs which degrade the dignity of the human person that transcends society: persons are not for the utility of anybody else, but *directly for God*. Precisely because of this, they are the only beings whose operations are directly related to the common good (cf. [ch. 37, h](#)).

g. Peace and war

Society, when rightly ordered to the common good has the twin goods of *unity* and *peace*.

“Peace” can be considered first in the individual person. In this

sense, St. Thomas says that it is “the repose of the appetite in the possession of the good”. God is the good of man (cf. [ch. 36, b](#)), and therefore true peace exists in the soul only when one loves God. The joy and peace one may experience with other goods is only temporary. No partial good can really bring lasting peace: no good can satisfy man completely except God, the infinite Good. Since we cannot attain the possession of God perfectly well, true peace in this life is imperfect: perfect peace exists only in the possession of God in Heaven (cf. [ch. 36, d](#)). But so as not to confuse peace with the immobility of death, St. Thomas also says that “peace requires struggle in order to remove the obstacles” (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, 29, 2). And as for “unity”, here also it comes from being totally ordained to the Good: the more one loves God above all things, the more one is unified or has *unity of life*.

Peace and unity in society are the result of the peace and unity in the persons therein: if those persons love and want the Good, they are all united in peace, since there is no reason for quarrelling. On the other hand, if they seek other goods in preference to God, the fragmentation of ends leads to conflicts which disrupt unity and peace. If the ordination to the common good, which is God, has been broken, all forms of substitute humanitarianism or philanthropy are futile.

Strife and war are, therefore, always evil. They are the expression of sin: the separation of man from God (cf. [ch. 39, c](#)). But it is also true, however, that unfortunately there are sometimes “necessary evils”. War may in a particular case be a necessary evil if certain moral conditions are fulfilled, namely:

(i) If there is a *just cause*, e.g. to thwart those who are destroying the common good fatally.

(ii) If it is motivated by a *right intention* in search of the true peace.

(iii) If it is promoted by *public authority* and not by individuals.

These classical conditions are very difficult to fulfil, and with the horrifying escalation of the destructive power of nuclear weaponry, they have become all the more restrictive.

CHAPTER 37

The Common Good

a. *Proper good and common good*

We already raised this point in metaphysics (ch. 19, f) and in the metaphysics of man (ch. 32, c, and 33, a): since the individual man is part of both the universe and society, we have to study the *common good*: the good of the universe and of society as a whole.

Let us distinguish first between “common” and “proper” good. Since the created universe is made up of parts, we can consider the good *proper* to each and that of the entire universe. Each part is related or ordained to God as the End of everything, but this ordination of each being to God implies a corresponding ordination of the parts to one another: this is what shows the difference between “proper” and “common” good.

In the universe, there is a real *unity of order* among all the beings in it. This “unity of order” implies two things: (i) that those parts are distinct from one another; (ii) that they are nevertheless related to one another (there is a kind of *fittingness* of things to one another). This unity of order is the consequence of the ordination of each to God. A philosophy excluding God from reality (were that possible) would make the universe meaningless.

In the internal order that exists among beings, some of them help others, thus making them better, i.e. spreading the good: *the more perfect those beings are, the more universally they spread the good*. As we saw in ch. 32, c, the spiritual creature is at the summit of the hierarchy of beings in the created universe. Therefore, the spiritual creature has a *special ordination to the common good*, since he can reach God through his proper operations of knowledge and love, and so, he can and should cause the good of others: hence the second commandment of the moral law, derived from the first, i.e. seeking the “proper” good of others.

Why should we love God above all things? Because He is the *end* of our being, the *last end*, the “common” good. And why should we love our neighbor as ourselves? Because if we have to tend to the common good, we must also tend to the “proper” good of each. The tendency to the common good implies the obligation to spread the good to others, i.e. to seek the proper good of each.

b. The common good of mankind

What is the common good of mankind or of the human species? We shall divide the answer into two points:

I. Regarding the *esse* of persons. As we have seen in [ch. 32, c](#), persons have their *esse* directly related to God and indirectly to other persons. In the universe, some parts help other parts, but there are two types of parts: (i) parts which exist *exclusively* for the sake of others, so that they are necessarily *related* to others; and (ii) parts which help and serve others, but have an *esse* which is “absolute” (opposite of “relative”).

The individuals of the non-spiritual species are entirely for the sake of their species: they do not keep their individuality, since they die. The lower species serve the higher, and all of them serve the human species. Due to their spirituality and, immortality, human persons have their *esse* not for the sake of another being, but directly for the sake of God (this is why they receive a personal and everlasting reward or punishment for their acts). Does this mean that they are not related to the other persons of the human species? Not at all: in fact, that *direct* ordination to God *increases* their ordination to other persons, because their spirituality gives them *a more universal capacity to love*, wherein they resemble God all the more, since God loves all His creatures freely.

II. As a corollary to I, there is an *internal order* both in man and in society. First, the ordination to God requires an internal order in the human compound of body and soul: an internal order among all the parts or potencies of body and soul, so that each will fulfill its own purpose and converge towards the *act of the will* of loving God, which is the last end. And second, each person should direct himself to the good of others, i.e. to the common good, *according to his own manner* of tending to the common good, using the material things below man for the common good, and hence for the proper good of each.

Let us now develop I and II.

c. Love with order

We observe then a coordination, subordination, and order of ends of all things in relation to man, and therefrom we glean the twofold moral precept of loving God and our neighbor. This good of internal order is attained when one loves each created good as one should, namely in accordance with *justice*. How is this implemented? *By bringing order into love*, or in other words, bringing the intelligence

into the feelings and emotions.

Msgr. Escrivá used to repeat that charity must be practiced always *with order*. Love without order leads to the failure of love: one falls into injustice then, by not loving *as one should* (cf. [ch. 23, e](#)). This kind of love “without the head” is reduced to a sentimentality which easily leads to favoritism. Charity has to be practiced with justice, i.e. with order: it has both to inspire and to transcend justice, but it must operate through it. St. Paul's sentence, “Follow the truth in a spirit of charity” (Eph. 4:15), puts it in a nutshell.

This is how St. Thomas explains the way the love of God and the love of neighbor are related, and in what order:

In the first place, real love of God includes love of neighbor, but surpasses it. On the other hand, the love of neighbor does not include the love of God, although without it, it would not be real love of neighbor. Secondly, the love of neighbor includes and surpasses the love of oneself; but on the other hand, the love of oneself does not include the love of neighbor, although without it, it would not be real love of oneself. Consequently, to love one's neighbor is better than to love oneself, and to love God is better than to love a creature.

These are then the metaphysical roots of the two commandments of the Natural Law: *it is not possible to love our neighbor if we don't love God*; and we do not love ourselves really if we do not love our neighbor: if we do not love our neighbor, we fail to spread the good as we should, and thus we fail to make ourselves better. One becomes better precisely by spreading the good, by making others better. This is to imitate God, since God gives the good *without receiving anything in return*, as He does not *need* anything because He is the fulness of being (cf. [ch. 23, d](#), and [24, c](#)).

d. The false philosophies

As a corollary to I and II, we have seen that *personal* virtue cannot be attained without *helping* others. Therefore, if an ideology or philosophy separates these two things (helping oneself vs. helping others), it creates a false disjunctive: “either individualism or collectivism”.

The first of those false philosophies is *individualism*, which says that the important thing is to improve oneself: it does not correspond to reality, because in order to improve oneself precisely, one has to help others. An expression of individualism is that virtue is something “private”, which may be related to God but has no social effects: “I mind my own business”... It can also appear in the spiritual life and thus distort our relations with God. The answer to it is that point of

Escrivá's *The Way* (no. 933): "Deeds are love, not sweet words". It is completely pointless to try to be close to God and tell Him that we love Him when we are not showing it with deeds by loving other people. What is the cure for individualism? Love of neighbor ("neighbor" means *any* human being) and doing the "apostolate", which means drawing others to God.

On the other hand, *collectivism*, which is also an error, goes to the other extreme by saying that the *entire* being of a person must be related to others. We have seen that this is not true, since a person has an "absolute" *esse* (see b, I). This is precisely what makes a person *free and autonomous*, in the sense that he gives or commits himself *because he wants to*. To this effect, he needs to have his own *personal* interior life (cf. [ch. 28, e](#)), or else, what is he going to "give" to society? No one can give what he does not have. In this sense, "apostolate must be the overflow of your life 'within'" (Escrivá's *The Way*, no. 961). Collectivism expresses itself through "activism": *doing* a lot of things, but without interior life, neglecting the life of piety and meditation. Another point of *The Way* (no. 930) says: "Apostolic soul, first take care of yourself", which means that one should not fall into "activism", that the apostle should take care of his interior life in the first place, but without falling into individualism either. The test is very clear in order to know whether the interior life is genuine or fake: the apostolic fruits, i.e. how many souls are brought close to God.

Consequently, the link between holiness and apostolate, which is supernatural, corresponds to the natural ordination of man to God and his fellowmen.

What is then the correct philosophy? To sum it up:

(i) Each person is directly ordained to God: this direct ordination to God must lead the person to help others with personal responsibility.

(ii) This helping others must consist above all in leading them to God, so that any other help (material or whatever it may be) must be in some way related to the apostolate, or else it has no real value.

e. Ordination of beings to the common good

We have seen that there is a "unity of order" among beings, which stems from the fact that they are all ordained to God. God is the "common good" of all, and it is "common" because it is "good", not the other way round. No creature is the good itself: every one of them is good only by participation. They participate in the good by obeying God, by tending to God; and they become more like God not only by

acquiring and possessing goodness, but also when communicating it to others.

When there are substances (i.e. beings that exist by themselves; called persons when they have a rational nature) which keep relations with one another with a view to a good which is common to all of them, then there is a “unity of order”. In this case, the activity of the totality will be the result of the *cooperation* of these substances. Cooperation is then the basis of society, and any type of “class-struggle” is against the being of society.

The totality of order of society as a whole is not a “sub-stance”: it does not exist by itself or act by itself. One may consider a collective action organized as a whole, but only in relation to the unity of the *effect*, in the sense that the actions of each person or substance involved converge towards the same effect, but the actions as such come from the substances even though they may be coordinated. For example, if many persons cooperate in manufacturing a product, the product is what unifies all their actions, but their actions remain actions of each one of those persons: human labor remains always *personal*. Collectivism tends to *substantialize* the collectivity and obliterate the individuals.

We can observe “unities of order” in the universe, for example, among the individuals of the same species, and among all the species in a hierarchy of degrees of perfection of actuality. All these unities of order make up the totality of the universe. And at the top of this scale, we find the unity of order (the many unified in relation to a common end) proper to human nature, called *society*.

f. The common good shared in the order of the universe

The order of the universe is the ultimate internal common good of creatures, also called *immanent* common good. Its cause is the external or *transcendent* Common Good (God, who transcends the universe), because what causes order is the end, not the other way round. A philosophy trying to eliminate God from society would remove the ultimate cause for the order of society, so that society would break down.

Within this order of the universe, the most perfect parts are the spiritual substances, because while they belong to this *immanent* order, they *transcend* it by their specific operation whereby they can reach God by themselves by knowledge and love.

g. Ordination of each single substance to the common good

We have seen that the “proper” good of each substance is ordained to the “common” good of the order in which it is included. Let us now enumerate the differences between those two “goods”:

(i) *The common good is more universal.* We all have the same “common good”, namely God. But is my own “proper good” the same as yours? No, because my own way of reaching the common good is peculiar to myself, since God has His own plan or design for me, different from yours. Each person has his or her own “proper good”, which consists in relating oneself to the common good *as God wants for him or her*: one's own peculiar and unique *vocation*. The “proper good” of each person is completely different from all the others: it is individualized and particularized, while the “common good” as such is universal. It is the good of all: we all share it.

(ii) *The common good is communicable.* Can I communicate my own “proper good” to another person? No, because what I have to do is what I am supposed to do: that which only *I* can do and is non-transferable. In this I cannot “pass the buck”, I cannot “communicate” it in that sense. On the other hand, the fact that I am related to God *can* be communicated: I can lead others to God. In other words, I can communicate the “common good”, but not the “proper good”, which is my own *responsibility*. That is why the “sense of responsibility” (awareness that what I fail to do, *no one else will do*, and God will ask me to render an account) is a sign of social maturity in a person (cf. Escrivá's *The Way*, no. 440).

(iii) *The common good is the good of the entire order.* The “proper good” is only the good of each part, but as ordained to the “common good”: the particular good is ordained to the common good because it is ordained to God. Thus, the individual is ordained to the common good as to *his own good*, not as a good foreign to him. This means that the common good is *proper* to the parts because the proper good of the parts is *not limited to its individuality*.

St. Thomas puts it this way: that the end of all the parts is the totality. In this sense, we talk of the common good as “proper” to the parts, but the “end” of one part, i.e. the peculiar manner whereby this part ordains itself to the common good is unique and non-transferable. I can say that my “proper” good consists in promoting the common good, and; in this sense, my “proper” good *is* the common good. But the: way *I have* to work for the common good is exclusive to myself, proper to myself, not *the* common good. Thus, St. Thomas also says that the particular or proper good is ordained to the common good by *coordination*, *subordination*, and *finalization* (chain of ends: one end directed to another and this to another, and eventually to the common

good).

h. Direct ordination of spiritual beings to the common good

There are degrees of ordination to the common good parallel to the degrees of participation in being. The spiritual creatures have a higher participation in the common good and their direct ordination to God binds them more intensely *to one another*. This is fulfilled in society: in the common cooperation for the common good of society.

On the other hand, the failure to relate oneself to the common good is precisely what is called *sin*: the failure of a particular person to relate to God as the common good, which brings with it a maladjustment to others in society. It is an element of disruption, of disunity, because it involves a disorderly love of oneself, which makes a person incommunicative and thereby unsocial: every sin is a social sin, as well as personal.

Let us also note that the spiritual good is more “common” and can be more participated in than the material good. Due to its immateriality, it is participated in or partaken of or shared, without being thereby corrupted or consumed. Spiritual goods like knowledge, wisdom, virtue, holiness, can be shared by many and thereby increase rather than diminish, because they remain in themselves undivided while being participated, which is the opposite of what happens to material things because of their inherent divisibility (cf. [ch. 25, c](#) and [e](#)).

CHAPTER 32

The Person and Human Nature

a. Nature as individuated

As was said in [ch. 17, a](#), “nature” is what is *specific* in a being (it is also called “species” in that sense): that which specifies or marks out that type of being. In material beings, such as man, nature is always “universal”, i.e. apt to be in many: it exists multiplied in many individuals, but without subsisting, i.e. without existing by itself. In other words, it is always *individuated* in single beings. Thus, human nature does not exist by itself, but in Peter, John, etc., always individuated in each.

What individuates human nature? What makes Peter, Peter, and John, John? It must be something related to matter (see [ch. 15, c](#)), since it is by matter that these individuals are differentiated: this body is not that body. As we saw, however, matter *in general* is not the principle of individuation, because matter “in general” is part of human nature “in general”. What individuates human nature, therefore, must be matter “in particular”, concrete matter, *this* one and not *that* one, namely matter “concretized by quantity” (*materia quantitate signata*) or the actual dimensions.

b. Person and personality

As we saw in [ch. 16, d](#), “person” is the individuated human nature subsistent in its being, and it subsists by virtue of the *act of being* (received and participated), not by virtue of its essence. All individuated natures exist because they have the act of being, and they are called persons when they are intelligent and free (spiritual). The principle of subsistence is the act of being, but the act of being can actualize only an individual being. This truth is of great importance in theology: the human nature of Christ is complete, i.e. individuated, and as such it is assumed by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, in Whom it subsists through the Divine *Esse*. Therefore, we cannot talk of a “human person” in Christ, because this would imply two acts of being and thereby two beings.

In the spiritual world, the only thing that exists by itself is the person, since everything else (nature and operations and activities,

and other accidents) exists *in* the person. This is relevant to assess moral responsibility: we should not blame the “nature” of man for our sins, because only the individual man subsists (and therefore acts); it is the person that acts through his nature, since only the person has being and activity (both of which are non-transferable), and hence only he has responsibility. Responsibility is essentially “personal”, not “social” or “collective”

While “person” is then, as we said, “individuated substance of a rational nature” (*rationalis naturae individua substantia*), “personality” usually means the character which the person has acquired by developing his abilities. On the other hand, “temperament” is the set of dispositions and inclinations arising from the material (individuated) composition (biochemical), which will be utilized in accordance with the intelligence and will of the person. A human being, from the first moment of his or her conception, has both temperament (proved conclusively by genetics) and personhood, and is thereby a subject of *rights* (the first of which is the right to live), although as yet he has no personality or character. This is also important for the concept of “maturity” in the philosophy of education.

c. The Place of the Person in the Universe

The universe is the totality of God's creation and is made up of parts. In every totality, the parts are for the sake of the totality. This is the natural order: the parts are for the totality with a certain *subordination*; and ultimately they are ordained to God.

If we draw a horizontal line separating the non-spiritual species (material bodies, living beings, animals) from the human species (which is the lowest spiritual species), from the line down in all the non-spiritual species *the individuals are ordained to the species*. This can be gleaned from the fact that all those individuals corrupt, but they tend to perpetuate their species. Then we can also observe that the lower species are for the higher ones: plants absorb inorganic materials and feed animals, which in turn feed man. We see this law everywhere in the universe: *the less perfect is for the more perfect in nature*. Finally, all non-spiritual species are for the human species.

Now, if all the things “below” the person are *for* the person, what is the person for? Can we apply to men what we said of the non-spiritual species, that they are *for* the species, that the individual men are for the human species or for society (Marxism)? Only if we reduce man to a non-spiritual species, denying his spiritual powers (personal intelligence, personal responsibility, personal immortality) wherewith he *transcends* society and the entire universe, and is ordained directly

to God as Total Truth and Total Goodness.

Therefore, man's relations with other fellow creatures are not the only relations he can have, nor are they the most radical. This is the reason for the immortality of the human soul, and the personal reward or punishment after man's mortal life hence the immense value of each human soul.

It is also true, however, that persons can and should be useful to other persons, although not in the same way as the non-spiritual beings, but rather helping others with the gifts they have received, sharing them with others in society, taking into account that it is God who bestows those gifts for the benefit of all His creatures: with the gift of *esse* come all other gifts.

In ethics we shall study again the “common good” and how man relates himself to God but *through society*. Now, let us see how man relates himself to the world as a whole.

CHAPTER 23

God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*

a. The essence of God

The Five Ways not only prove the existence of God, but give us some glimpses of the essence or nature of God. There are two questions we can ask about anything, one about its existence and another about its essence or nature. So with God, we have first seen the question about His existence, and now we proceed to investigate how much we can know about His nature.

From all that we have been discussing all along; we can say right from the start that we can even give a definition of God, which is metaphysically as good as a definition can be. Of course, a definition of God can never be perfect for us to express: strictly speaking, God is *ineffable* for us, i.e. inexpressible, because He is *incomprehensible*, as we said in [ch. 21, h](#). Nevertheless, we can say something which is strictly true, however incomprehensible it may be, about His essence, and this is that He is the fullness of being, subsistent being itself, *ipsum esse subsistens*: the source of all being, the being *by essence* as distinct from the being *by participation*. This is truly His definition: that *He is*. For all other beings, “to be” is the *act* of their essence; for God, “to be” *is* His very essence.

There is a correlation of this in divine revelation, when in Exodus 3:14 God gives His name to Moses as I AM WHO AM and HE WHO IS, which St. Thomas understood precisely as we have noted, and called it “this sublime truth” (*haec sublimis Veritas*): see [ch. 7, d](#).

b. The simplicity of God

From this basic definition of God, we can logically deduce the *attributes* of God. “Attributes” are predicates one can apply to a subject as belonging to its essence. And the first attribute we can apply to God as a consequence of His being Being Itself, is absolute *simplicity*, i.e. that He has no composition of parts at all. This is because *esse* itself implies perfect simplicity: it implies nothing else (see [ch. 7, d](#), and [14, c](#)). “To be a horse”, for example, implies composition, but “to be does not, and that is precisely what God is: To Be Itself.

Now, if God is absolutely simple, the following points follow

again logically:

(i) *God is not a body*, He is not “corporeal”: there are no quantitative parts in Him. This would imply potentiality in God, since parts are related to the whole as potency to act, but God is pure *act* of being. “Materiality” in relation to pure potentiality or to nothing is a “perfection”, but it cannot be attributed to God since it implies imperfection in itself, and, as we said in [ch. 21, h](#), only perfections without imperfection in their essence, such as spirituality or intelligence, can be applied to God, albeit to an infinite degree. Therefore, corporeal representations of God can only be aids for our sensibility-bound intelligence, “condescensions” on the part of God to raise our minds towards the Spirit (cf. Jn. 4:24).

(ii) Since God is *spirit*, there is in Him no composition of matter and form, because matter is *passive potency* and God is pure act. What is composed of matter and form is *good* because of the form, not because of the matter. Since “form” is what determines or perfects the matter, and “good” is the perfection of being (cf. [ch. 19, e](#)), a thing is good on account of its form, not on account of its matter, although the matter actualized by the form is also good, but only by participation. In God, nothing limits His Being.

(iii) God is a *substance without accidents*. The “substance” of God is identical with His essence, although it is not customary to call God a “substance”, for various historical reasons. There is nothing “accidental” in God, because a substance is related to its accidents as potency to act (see [ch. 13](#)). This means that the “divinity” of God is identical with God Himself, while in a man, for example, his humanity is not identical with himself: there is composition and participation. In God there is neither a matter limiting the form, nor a substance being perfected by accidents.

(iv) In God there is *no composition of essence and the act of being*. Since He is *esse* itself, no essence limits Him: His essence is *esse*; *esse* and essence are identical in Him. Otherwise, He would be by participation like all of us creatures, and He would be caused by something else. What would happen if the divinity were distinct from the act of being God? That then the act would have been received by the essence, and so God would be caused by something else. That is the case of creatures, wherein there is a real distinction between our essence and the act of being what we are (see [ch. 16, a](#)). But in God, the act of being God is the same as the essence of God: He is not by participation, but by essence.

(v) Because of (iii) and (iv), in God there is no real distinction between the *suppositum* (see [ch. 16, d](#)) and the nature, while in man there is. We say that man is a “rational *suppositum*” or a “*suppositum*

of a rational *nature*". That nature in man is really distinct from the *suppositum* as such. Why? Because the *suppositum* is the actual being that is and exists, while the nature (we say that the *suppositum* subsists *in* the nature) is what makes the *suppositum* the way it is: not what makes it "to be", but what makes it "to be what it is", a person. It is similar to the real distinction between essence and the act of being, which does not apply to God either. The divine essence is then identical with the individuality of God.

(vi) God is, therefore, the supreme *unity*, because of the perfect identity of essence and *esse* (see [ch. 19, c](#)).

(vii) Divine simplicity is *not a simplicity of emptiness*, but of infinite richness, fullness of reality possessed in perfect unity (the simplicity of ignorance, for example, is a simplicity of emptiness, while the simplicity of wisdom is a simplicity of fullness: wisdom does not consist in knowing *many* things, but in having a *unified* knowledge of reality: *non multa, sed multum*).

c. The transcendence of God

It also follows from *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, that God is *transcendent* to the world, distinct from it, and infinitely more perfect: there is an infinite difference, separation and distinction between God and the universe. This is sometimes not clearly understood, and there are many varieties of *pantheism*, or the belief that the universe *is* God, or that God is the "soul" of the universe. People sometimes have worshipped the sun, or the wind, or the forces of nature, or just Nature. These errors are due to lack of understanding, since it is: impossible for God to be confused with the universe or any, part of it, as God is the fullness of being, and all other things participate in being. As we have seen in [ch. 16, a](#), there is a radical difference between creatures and the Creator, since in creatures there is a real composition of essence and act of being, while in the Creator there is no real composition at all.

We can also see this as we go through the Five Ways: if God is the first unmoved mover, He cannot be one of those movers; if He is the first uncaused cause, He cannot be one more cause in the universe (He has to be *outside* the universe), etc.

And thus God is also infinitely *perfect*. "Perfect" means what is complete and has no defect, no empty spaces, so to speak, no gaps in its being. The being of God is perfectly *massive*, without any gaps at all: *Esse* Itself implies no limitation, no empty spaces. (See [ch. 19, h](#), and [22, e](#))

As for the intimacy of God in every created being, see [ch. 24, f](#).

d. The supreme goodness of God

God is also supreme *goodness*. We have seen that “being” and “unity” are interchangeable, since every being is one, and whatever is one is a being. The same thing happens with goodness: “being” and “good” are also interchangeable because whatever *is*, to the extent that it is, is good, and whatever is good, is something (see [ch. 19, e](#)). If something does not exist in reality, is it good? No. In fact, we call it “no good” in English, as when we say that “it’s *no good* having a million dollars *in our imagination*”. For something “to be good”, it has to be *actually* there.

Now, if “to be” and “to be good” are interchangeable, and God is To Be Itself, He must be Supreme Goodness: if He is Subsistent Being Itself, He must be Subsistent Goodness also. And if being is called good in the sense that it is the object of an inclination or tendency to an end, as we saw, the Supreme Goodness must be the object of ultimately all inclinations, namely the most *lovable* being. God is the last end of all creatures, in so far as they all tend to the fullness of *their* being. All of them tend to God *by nature*, but only the spiritual creatures tend to God consciously and freely, and can actually adhere to Him by knowledge and love. This is precisely the first commandment of the natural law: that spiritual creatures should love God above all things and with their whole heart, as otherwise they frustrate their nature. (See [ch. 32, c](#), and [37, h](#))

If God is our last end, we have to love Him with an *absolute* love, i.e. above all things and without any conditions. *Absolutum* in Latin means “untied”: if someone is tied down, and I untie him, I “absolve” him (hence, “absolution” from sins); it means then “free from any ties”. The opposite of “absolute” is *relative*, i.e. tied to something. The love of God has to be absolute, without ties, unconditional. This is the reality of things: how the love of God should be, because He is the Last End, the supreme goodness, and all other goodnesses and ends are subordinated to Him, and no other ends should interfere.

e. How God should be loved

The first quality of the love of God is that it has to be absolute. The second is that it has to be *total*. In other words, we must love God *and* all that has to do with Him *in proportion to its proximity to Him*.

Everything *has* to do with God, because everything is a creature of God: we must love the entire creation of God. There are

things, however, which are closer to Him than others, and to that extent more lovable: there must be *order* in love, an order which is determined by proximity to God.

Specifically for us Christians, the closest reality to God is the humanity of Christ, because it is “hypostatically” joined to the Divine Person, and so it is the joint instrument of divine grace. The humanity of Christ, therefore, ought to be loved above all things after the Divinity. And then, what is closest to God? His Blessed Mother; and then St. Joseph; and then the Church, and in the Church, the Pope and so forth; and then the people closest to us: parents, brothers, sisters, etc.

But there is another criterion, aside from “proximity to God”, namely *likeness to God*. In this sense, those who sincerely strive to live a holy life, and so look more *like* God, ought to be loved more.

“Total” means also that this love of God must be “with our whole heart”, i.e. with all one's capacity for love. “Heart” means here (this is also its biblical meaning) the whole person with all his powers or the very center of the self. In a person, where does love issue from? From what faculty or power? From the will; but then it involves the entire person, with his sentiments and feelings. The intellect perceives the good, but the will initiates the movement towards it (love), and then the rest of the person follows (animals, on the other hand, love only led by short-lived sentiments and feelings). This is then how we must love God: first with our will, i.e. obeying His commandments, without which there is no real *human* love. Sentiments are secondary, though not to be despised; but the real test of love is obedience.

Lastly, regarding this “total” love, God should be loved *as much* as He can be loved. Of course, this is not possible for man, but what is possible is to love Him *always more*. St. Thomas says that we can sin against the first commandment by failing to love God *more* than we should. If our conscience tells us that we should love God more, then we have to. Otherwise we will go against our conscience, and thus sin. If, we take God seriously, we will always find ourselves short of love of God, and therefore in the need of making a constant resolution of loving Him more and not falling into the rut of tepidity or indifference to God. This is the best metaphysical argument against Pharisaical self-complacency, against lukewarmness and mediocrity. Who can dare to say, “I'm good enough”, “I cannot be better than I am”?

In a Christian context, and in the light of this metaphysical doctrine, what we call *apostolate* or *evangelization* means *helping others to love God*: any other help we can give them must aim at this. It is the first requirement and expression of love for others, because to love someone means to want the *best* for him, and “the best”, i.e. the Supreme Good, is God (and to love oneself truly means to direct

oneself to God).

And finally, since God has the maximum richness of perfection and unity, God is *Beauty* Itself (perfect harmony of unity and variety). From this we can draw the metaphysical consequence that to know God and to love Him is the greatest *happiness* for spiritual creatures, because the experience of beauty makes an intelligent creature (a person) happy or *ecstatic* (beyond himself): the more beauty he can experience, the more ecstatic he becomes, but God *is* infinite subsistent Beauty. As we have seen, however, beauty cannot be separated from goodness (or from truth and unity), and so the contemplation and enjoyment of God (Beatific Vision) can only be attained, or “inchoated” (initiated) in this life, by those who have absolutely renounced evil and committed themselves unconditionally to good (to the pursuit of holiness).

f. Immensity, immutability, eternity

These three divine attributes also flow logically from the *Esse Itself*:

(i) From the infinity of the *Esse*, it follows that God is everywhere: He is *immense* (see [ch. 24, f](#)).

(ii) If He has the totality of *esse*, He cannot change into something else, since this would be an imperfection: He is *immutable* (which is not the same as “static”).

(iii) And if He cannot change, He possesses His Being all at once, without any kind of transition: He is *eternal*.

“Eternal” does not quite mean “forever”. The latter term may mean something which had a beginning but will have no end, like for example our own being: we have a beginning, but because of our immortal souls we have no end, we are “forever”. But we are not eternal, strictly speaking. Eternity is, in the classical definition of Boethius (5th century), “the total, simultaneous and perfect possession of life without limits” (*interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*). Since God cannot change, for this would imply imperfection, He possesses His Being all at once, totally and perfectly: eternity is the manner of His abiding in being, of his enduring or duration, a manner fully *transcending time* and any type of succession or transition, since the latter implies change.

It is disturbing, therefore, to hear the unqualified statement that the Church “has to change”. If the Church is the witness of God, the Church has to tell us what is *eternal*, eternally true and valid for us. In this sense, if the Church were to change, it would be just another

human institution. Is change good? It depends: if it is for the better, yes; but not if it is for the worse. At any rate, change always implies imperfection, because if it is for the better, it means that the thing that has changed was not perfect; and if it is for the worse, the conclusion is obvious. Change *may be* good, but only if it is for the; better. But change “for its own sake” is childish. God does not change at all. Of course, *I* am changing all the time (every day of my life I should try to become a little better). But it is not for the Church to change: not in dogma and morals, because the Church is perfect in that sense, since it comes from God, that is, the Church in what is divine in it, not of course in what is human. If by “the Church” we mean the people in it, then of course we *have to* change, all of us, and *for the better*. But if by “the Church” we mean its power of sanctification (the life of Christ in the Sacraments and in the doctrine of salvation), that *cannot* change, because it is divine, and therefore eternal.

When we contemplate the immensity and infinity of the Being of God in comparison to our creaturehood, our attitude should be one of deep *humility* (of adoration and thanksgiving, petition and reparation), including the humility of the mind, the intellectual humility of not expecting that we can understand God or divine matters perfectly well. We cannot fall into the arrogance of *rationalism*: we must accept the *mystery* of God and all divine things, as always surpassing our reason out of the abundance of light (see [ch. 21, h](#)).

CHAPTER 22

Ways of Demonstrating the Existence of God

a. *Elucidation of terms*

Let us now take up the actual demonstration of God's existence, i.e. the ways to show that the proposition "God exists" is true. Is this proposition evident or not? "Evident" is that which shows itself to us directly, so that it does not need any demonstration. For a proposition to be evident, at least as far as we are concerned, both the *subject* and the *predicate* must be known to us. If they are not, the proposition is not evident. Does this mean that it is not true? No. It may not be evident, but it may be true, although the truth of this proposition may have to be demonstrated.

Is the proposition "God exists" evident? If it were evident, there would not be atheists. Why are there atheists? Because this is not an evident proposition, although it is true and certain, but it needs to be demonstrated, since the terms of the proposition are not known to us directly. Since we do not see God directly, we have to prove that He exists.

At the beginning of his *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas tackles this matter by first criticizing certain arguments that had been advanced, which claimed that this proposition was evident, and showing the need for demonstration. In this case, any demonstration must be *a posteriori*, as we said above, namely from the effect to the cause. (See [ch. 18, h](#), and [21, e](#)).

St. Thomas proceeds to put forward five demonstrations of this type, which he took from other philosophers and theologians, but giving them a much more profound import, because of his own original synthesis of the doctrine of participation and that of act and potency (cf. [ch. 4, b](#), and [16, b](#)). He selected the five which he found most conclusive, all of them *a posteriori*, after rejecting other proofs which, instead of going from real facts to a conclusion, start from an "idea" and conclude in reality.

b. *The first way: motion*

The first of these arguments starts with the fact of *motion* or change. No one can have any doubt about this fact: motion in the sensible world, motion of things as we see them. This *is* evident, unlike

the proposition “God exists”. And this is the method of the metaphysics of *esse*: first we see sensible reality, then we reach a principle, and from the principle we deduce. What is the principle we arrive at from this observation? Here we pass from a fact of experience to a principle which derives from experience. How? Through the definition of motion.

What is motion? (see [ch. 7, c](#) and [14, b](#)) In motion we have an *imperfect act*, because if it were potency it would not be moving, and if it is perfect act it is no longer moving; so, it must be in between: an act, but imperfect. Now, in order to move, if it is in potency, it cannot move (a potency does not move). In order to act, a thing has *to be* in act: only the act moves. For something to *act*, it has to *be* first, i.e. to be in act, because if it is in potency, it is not yet. It *is*, only when it is in act. Therefore, in order to move, it has to be in act.

But if something is in potency, it cannot move itself, because it is not in act. Therefore, something else has to move it. But for something to move, it has to be in act. Therefore, if something is moving, there must be something else that is moving it, because a thing cannot move itself: *whatever is moved, is moved by another*. (See [ch. 18, h](#))

Now, if that “another” is itself being moved, then it needs another one, and so we come to one which is not moved by anything, because it is not potency at all, but *pure act*. We call this “pure act” God. And we cannot go on *ad infinitum* in a chain of movers: if there is no “first”, then there is no movement at all, since movement always comes from another. We must come to one which is the first mover, which is unmoved, and this first unmoved mover we call God.

This reasoning process is rather laborious, although logically spotless. Let us go over it again.

We see things moving, and motion is act-potency. But a thing in potency cannot move in so far as it is in potency, because it is not yet; so, it has to be in act. A thing cannot move itself, because that would mean that it is in potency and in act in the same sense, which is impossible.

(What about our moving ourselves, as when I move my arm? That's only a manner of speaking. We don't really move ourselves. It is a process in our being whereby our act is the one that begins: the will commands, and moves the arms, legs, etc. It is not that we move ourselves, because nothing can move itself. What happens is that we are made of parts and potencies. In act, we are only one thing, but in potency we are many things. We have many potencies, not only transient but permanent, like the potency of walking. Since we are made up of parts, there is no contradiction in saying that we move ourselves, understanding it in the sense that some part of myself moves another part. Nothing moves itself as such.)

In the motion process there is always an act first, an act that moves a potency, because a potency cannot move itself. This means that if one thing is moved by another, and this by another, and so on, we must come to one that is unmoved and moves. We cannot go on *ad infinitum*, since that would not account for the motion. It would be like something passing from hand to hand without belonging to any. What is the source of motion? Where does it *come from*? From nowhere? That is the same as saying that there is no motion, which of course doesn't make sense. This demonstration proves not only that God must exist, but that He is *pure act*.

When Aristotle used this proof, he did not conclude that that “pure act” must be God. His “pure act” or “first mover” is not the supreme being for him. This is because he did not conceive “act” as St. Thomas does (i.e. as “act of being”), but only as the act of *activity* or of moving. St. Thomas, with more metaphysical depth, conceives the “pure act” as absolutely pure, i.e. as the *fullness of being*, and so identifies it with God Himself.

c. The second way: activity

The second way begins with another fact of experience, namely the fact of *activity* or efficient causality. We observe that things *act*: by acting they produce effects, they cause, they are efficient causes or *agents*. “To produce” means to cause efficiently, to cause an effect efficiently.

Now, for a cause to act, it has to be in act, in act of being, because activity follows being (cf. [ch. 16, c](#)): *operari sequitur esse*. Nothing causes unless it exists. When we see causes producing effects (like a cat begetting kittens), we can ask the question, How has this cause come to be in the first place, since in order to act, one has to be? Is this being of the efficient cause an effect itself? As we have seen, in order to “cause itself”, something would have to be both in act and in potency in the same sense. Therefore, no cause can cause itself. And so, this particular cause has to be itself the effect of another cause. But here again, we cannot proceed *ad infinitum*, for this would imply an activity belonging to no one, an activity which cannot be accounted for, i.e. *no* activity or causality, which contradicts the evidence of the senses.

We must come therefore to a *first cause*, which is (i) uncaused, and (ii) the cause of everything else. And we call this first *uncaused* efficient cause or agent, God.

d. The third way: generation and corruption

The fact of experience here is that of *generation* and *corruption*. Remember in connection with motion or change (ch. 7, 13, etc.) that there are different types of motion: of place (local motion), of quality (alteration), of quantity (increase and decrease), and of substance (generation and corruption). It is a fact attested by our sensible experience that substances generate other substances and get corrupted or broken down: they are corruptible and they generate others.

This observation leads us to the principle that beings which are generated and corrupted *are not necessary*: they may or may not be. Now, suppose that all the substances in the universe are like this: would that be possible? If they all might or might not be, there is no reason why they *should* be there at all: nothing would exist, which of course contradicts the evidence. If none of them has come to be necessarily, what makes them be?

What follows from this is that there must be beings which are not like that, which must exist necessarily, which cannot not be. If all of them were possible to be or not to be, none of them would be: therefore, there must be some which cannot not be.

Now, that necessity of beings which cannot not be, may again be either *by itself* or *from another* (*a se* or *ab alio*): something may be either necessary by itself, or necessary because another made it so. But if all of them were “from another”, we would again have a chain *ad infinitum*, which is impossible. And so, there must be one which is necessary *by itself*, and is the reason for the necessity of all other necessities. This “being which is necessary by itself” must then be “to be itself” (*ipsum esse*), and we call Him God.

This “third way” is more difficult than the previous two, because it has another step: the distinction between beings which may or may not be, and beings which must be and cannot not be but have this necessity “from another”. The angels belong to the latter type: they exist necessarily, but their necessity has been given to them by God.

e. The fourth way: perfection (a summary of metaphysics)

This is the most difficult of the five. It was taken from Plato and is based on the doctrine of participation. It is the most profound and metaphysical, and so the most convincing in the end.

The fourth way begins with a fact of experience which in this case is rather intelligible than sensible, since only the intelligence can perceive it, although it is perceived *in* sense experience, and that is the

fact of the *degrees of perfection* in beings: “perfection” is something which only the intelligence grasps.

We observe not only that there are types of beings which are more perfect than others, but within the same type we observe individuals more perfect than other individuals. A living being shows more perfection of being than an inanimate thing, and among living beings there are also obvious degrees of perfection. This observation leads us to the principle that those *degrees imply the existence of a maximum*, because the “more” and the “less” mean something only in relation to a “most”.

There are two types of perfections of being:

(i) *Predicamental* perfections (see [ch. 16, b](#)) or perfections of the *essence*, founded on the *formal act*, which is what determines the essence to be what it is, i.e. the essence *as essence*, not the essence *as being*; e.g. the essence of dog, the perfections of dogs as dogs, not as *this* actually existing dog (with the act of being), but of dog as an essence, in the abstract.. What perfections does the essence have? *Formal* perfections, such as materiality, substantiality, life, sensitivity: perfections of the dog as an essence, without considering the *act of being*. Do these perfections have a “more” and a “less”? Yes. But do they imply a *subsistent* maximum? Can a maximum, say, of sensitive life exist *by itself*? No, sensitive life exists *in* the dog, but not by itself? In predicamental perfections there is no *subsistent* maximum. Their maximum would only be in the field of ideas: we can conceive a maximum life and a maximum of dogness, but that is just a pure idea, which does not imply *actuality of being*.

(ii) *Transcendental* or pure perfections, founded directly on the act of being, and therefore to be found only in actually existing substances. not in ideas, or abstractions or essences. As we have seen, the perfection of being is the act of being: a being is more perfect *as being*, the more actual it is. And the more actual it is, the more *one*, the more *true*, and the more *good* it is (see [ch. 19](#)). Now, these perfections are participated in the actually existing beings by degrees, and *they do imply a subsistent maximum*, as otherwise their actual existence could not be accounted for. They have these perfections *participated*, and therefore they must be *from another*, because if they had them *by themselves* they would have them *in their fulness*. Therefore, there must be a *cause* of those perfections, which *is* those perfections in their fulness, namely *being itself*, unity itself, truth itself, goodness itself, and cause of all these perfections, as well as of the “predicamental” perfections, in all participated beings. And we call this Cause, God.

The fourth way is thus like a summary of metaphysics: a

laborious but immensely rewarding exercise.

f. The fifth way: order and intelligence

This way is simpler. It starts with the fact of experience that all things act for an end (see [ch. 18, f](#)): whatever moves, moves in a direction, towards a destination. There is activity, and there is direction to an end. What principle follows therefrom? In order to move towards an end, this end must be *known as end* beforehand, but only an *intelligence* can do this. So, if all things, including non-intelligent ones, act for an end, there must be a *universal intelligence* which directs all things to their end.

In other words, if all things act for an end, and it is proper to intelligence to act for an end, and if even intelligent beings who act for an end are not free to choose the end as such but only the appropriate means, there must be an Intelligence that orders all the beings of the universe to their end. And this infinite and universal Intelligence we call God.

Bear in mind, however, that the fact of experience of the Fifth Way is not that “there is harmony in the universe”, as if it were a “clock” implying the existence of a “clock-maker”: this is the usual misconception of this argument in the history of philosophy. What St. Thomas sees in the universe is *order*, i.e. ordination to an end in all things, i.e. *each* thing is ordained to *its own* end.

CHAPTER 28

Judgment

a. The operation of judging

The second step in the process of understanding is the judgment. In simple apprehension, we look at being as indivisible: concepts are essentially indivisible. But when our minds begin to *compose*, to put realities together, they are performing a different operation: the mind here puts together or relates realities taking into account their *real status*. For example, the concept of “house” is indivisible, but I can analyze it by saying that “it is a construction made by men so that they can live together in privacy, and protect themselves against the inclemencies of the weather”. There I am no longer in “simple apprehension”, but have passed to the second operation of affirming or denying, composing or dividing: judgment.

In this act of composition, the mind grasps the unity of many elements in a single act of understanding, a complex act, but still one act: the simplicity is in the act, not in the content. Judgment is then that operation in the process of understanding wherein the mind grasps the composition of being, as well as the order of beings to one another or how they are related to one another.

b. Judgment and truth

The judgment may be either true or false, depending on whether it agrees with reality or not. The simple apprehension, on the other hand, is either true or it's not a simple apprehension. In the judgment there is a possibility of error or falsehood, because it states a relationship to reality: the mind has actually composed or divided, it has committed itself, while in simple apprehension the mind either does or does not grasp the reality.

Truth, i.e. the agreement of the mind with reality, should not be confused with “certainty”: it is possible to make a true statement without much certainty, or to make a false judgment with firm certainty. Truth has an objective basis, while certainty is a subjective state.

c. Certainty and belief

Certainty is the *firmness of the assent of the mind*. What are the causes of certainty? There are two:

- (i) The *evidence* of things directly in front of us.
- (ii) The *authority* of a witness who deserves our trust.

A very big percentage of our certainties is based on authorities. All the things of the past, for instance, are known in this way. We have to rely on the information others pass on to us.

“Evidence” may be either (i) direct, or (ii) demonstrable: (subject to proof), and it gives rise to rational certainty (“physical” or based on empirical data; or “metaphysical” or based on the very essence of the thing). On the other hand, the authority of a witness gives rise to human faith or belief or “moral” certainty. Short of these two sources of certainty, a mere “probability” can only give rise to “opinion”, not certainty.

The act of human faith whereby, for instance, I believe that I was born in a particular place because I have been told by reliable witnesses, is a free and reasonable judgment about a truth which is not evident. It is *free*, because there is no logical *compulsion* to accept it; but it is also *reasonable*, because it is based on good grounds.

Now, which is stronger, the certainty based on evidence or the certainty based on authority of witness? What is more certain, that $2 + 2 = 4$, or that I was born in such a place according to my parents? It is clear that the certainty of evidence has more weight, since *human* authorities are not infallible: they may deceive or be deceived. However, if instead of human faith, it is *divine* faith, i.e. if I believe what God says, in this case the authority of God yields the highest certainty, because *He can neither deceive nor be deceived* (I Vatican Council). The act of divine faith, however, is also *free* and *reasonable*.

d. Discursive process of reasoning

In [ch. 26](#), we said that through reason we can go from what we know already to a new knowledge, a new judgment. This is called the discourse of reason or *discursive reasoning* (from Latin *discursus* = running along a course; a path one goes through). This manner of knowing is proper to man. The angels, on the other hand, have a purely intuitive intelligence, without any need for discourse, unhampered by any material conditions.

On account of the substantial unity of man, the human intelligence is united to the body, so that, as we have seen, it has to go from the sensible to the intelligible in union with the body, and it

normally knows step by step, i.e. by reasoning.

The intelligence is the power to know the being of what things are (from Latin *intus-legere* = to read into), to know what they are in themselves. But it can operate in two ways:

(i) intuitively, by reaching the truth directly, without any process (*intellectus*);

(ii) reasoning, by reaching the truth through the discursive process (*ratio*).

Man is defined as “rational animal” because he uses *ratio* ordinarily, rather than *intellectus*. However, he does use the “intellect” in some specific cases, like those of immediate or *direct evidence* (induction), and it is also the intellect that forms the concept of being and the principle of non-contradiction in this fashion. But it is a fact that the bulk of human knowledge is acquired through reasoning.

For reasoning to generate knowledge in a person, however, this person has to go through the process himself: the possession of conclusions, without seeing the inference from premises, does not constitute *knowledge*, but a mere accumulation of data. It is useful to accumulate data, but as long as one tries gradually to better understand them. For instance, it is very good for children to memorize the catechism formulas so as to avoid misunderstandings. But as they grow older, they have to strive to understand them better, by further and deeper study of the truths of faith (see [ch. 1, a](#)). People must be taught how to *reason*, beginning with everyday experience, just as Jesus Christ taught the doctrine of salvation, beginning with parables and comparisons from everyday life and thereby raising people's minds to higher realities.

Thus, since man is not an angel, he needs formation. By reasoning we can go from one truth to another, if our judgments are correct, and the linking of these judgments is correct. Likewise, there can be chains of errors in reasoning: if we start from a judgment which is false, all the judgments following it will also be false, even if the reasoning is correct. The process of reasoning has to be geared to the direct intellectual grasp of reality, which is the ultimate criterion of truth.

e. Self-knowledge, consciousness and reflection

What is consciousness? The term comes from the Latin *conscientia* (*cum scientia* = what goes with knowledge). We say that we are “conscious”, when our external senses (our wits) are in contact with reality, and the “coordinating sense” is in operation, gathering “perceptions” through the amalgamation of “sensations”. Sleep is

precisely the interruption of this operation of the coordinating sense: the other internal senses then continue to operate, but having lost contact with reality, they fly into the unreality of dreams. In the conscious state, we know, and we know that we know: we *advert* to our knowledge; while in the unconscious state, whether asleep (dreaming) or awake (day-dreaming or absent-minded), we do not advert to it, we are not aware of our acts.

Consciousness is not a “potency” but an act, and in the case of man an act of the intelligence, namely a judgment in which the subject is *I* and the predicate is the act or property of the *I*, e.g. “I know”. “I” stands for the person, who is the subject or bearer of the human nature or *essence* and of the *act of being* a man. When a man is awake and in contact with reality, all his acts of knowing and willing and his tendencies are accompanied by consciousness. And there is a specific type of consciousness about the good or evil of human acts, which is called moral consciousness or *conscience* (see ethics).

In man there is also “self-consciousness”, which means that he has the power of perfect reflection, as we saw when dealing with the spirituality of the intelligence (ch. 26). This reflection in man can be either (i) *concomitant* with the act of knowledge, i.e. running alongside the act of knowing, so to speak (I know that I know); or (ii) *explicit*, i.e. looking upon the self as knowing (I know myself as knowing). The latter is called *in actu signato*, and the former *in actu exercito*.

This power of reflection and self-consciousness explains the *interior life* or inwardness or inner life of man. Animals do not have “interior life” because they cannot perform the perfect reflection since they are bound to matter. They can only accumulate sense experience, but without any self-consciousness.

This self-knowledge, which is a perfection proper to spiritual creatures, is not however the greatest perfection of that creature, because the self of the creature is neither the highest truth nor the supreme goodness: the perfection of a creature lies in achieving its end, which is, in the case of the spiritual creature, to know and love God.. But in order to know and love God, the spiritual creature must be conscious not only of the “you” but also of the “I”.

f. Conclusion: knowledge as enrichment of being

Knowledge is a “climbing up” in the order of *actuality*, in the sense that by means of knowledge man acquires in an “intentional” way, not physically (see ch. 14, b and c; 27, c and d), the participated being of other beings. From there, he can “climb” to the Being-by-essence which is God (as distinct from “participated being”), always,

however, in an incomplete way, since a creature cannot attain a perfect knowledge of God, although he can always improve it.

Knowledge is then a progressive enrichment in being on the part of the knower, who becomes more and more as he knows more and more, and can thus move towards the pure actuality of God.

Now, just as the human intelligence can ascend towards the fullness of actuality, it can also descend towards potentiality: we can know what is potential, and ultimately the root of potentiality which is *prime matter* (cf. [ch. 7, c](#)), but always starting from act, from actuality, because in order to know we have to start from the “to be” or actuality of things: what we know directly and primarily is the actuality of sensible things (cf. [ch. 26, b](#)), and from there we can go (i) up towards God as the fullness of actuality, or (ii) down towards potentiality. This is the range of human knowledge.

PART V

Metaphysics of Man

CHAPTER 25

Introduction

a. Recapitulation: metaphysics as comprehensive knowledge

At the beginning of the Church, in order to explain the faith better, the early Christians resorted to philosophy. “Theology” is the elaboration of our faith, the elucidation or understanding of our faith: *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. “Philosophy”, on the other hand, is “reason” seeking understanding. It is in the Christian person (one who has received the faith) that these two converge. Philosophy and theology do not exist in a vacuum but in some mind, namely in the Christian person: with his or her one mind, one will, one personality. When the Christian reasons about his faith, he is “doing” theology; when he does so, he is also “doing” philosophy. Reason is used in both theology and philosophy (see [ch. 2, c](#)).

The early Christians received the faith, tried to better understand what it contained, and developed a body of truths about reality which, although philosophical, would not have come about without the faith (see [ch. 3, c](#)). We have seen the importance of studying this Christian “philosophy” (i) because it is like a bridge with non-believers, and (ii) because it is the instrument or “handmaid” of theology.

The study of Christian philosophy begins with the “first philosophy”. *Metaphysics* deals with the first questions asked by the intelligence: what is this? what is it for? where does it come from?... It is called “first philosophy, not because there are other “philosophies” after it, but because it surveys, as from a watch-tower, the entire field of the “pursuit of wisdom”. Metaphysics is *the philosophical outlook on the entire expanse of reality and on every part of it*. And thus we can distinguish between (i) metaphysics proper, i.e. the study of reality as such (being), and (ii) the metaphysical study of specific aspects or portions of reality (see [ch. 8](#)).

A useful distinction can be made here between the *material object* and the *formal object* of a science, as we did in [ch. 11, b](#), and [21, b](#). The material object is the subject-matter: what the science is about. The formal object is (i) the light of the intelligence in which the material object is studied or the point of view of the intelligence (*lumen sub quo* or formal object *quo*); and (ii) the aspect of the material object considered in that light (formal object *quod*).

Now, the material object of metaphysics is everything that is

real, and the formal object *quod* is the aspect of *being as such* (cf. [ch. 7, a](#)), while the formal object *quo* is the “third degree of elevation above matter” (cf. [ch. 6, e](#)). In other words, the metaphysical outlook of the intelligence on reality goes through the prism of *being as such*.

Consequently, in the metaphysics “of man” we study man not in this or that aspect of humanity, but in the totality and essentiality of the *being* of man (cf. [ch. 8, a](#)). We can also speak of the metaphysics of the material world or “philosophy of nature”, of the metaphysics of the good or “ethics”, of the metaphysics of God or “natural theology”, of the metaphysics of knowledge or “gnoseology”, and so forth:

<i>Material Object</i>		
Metaphysics of Being		
Metaphysics of God		
Metaphysics of Man		
Metaphysics of Being good		
Metaphysics of Being material world		
Metaphysics of Being knowledge		

As to the formal object, therefore, metaphysics is one science; but through the material object it can be diversified. After metaphysics proper comes natural theology and the other subjects in the abovementioned order.

b. Object of the metaphysics of man

The “metaphysical” question about man is, therefore, *What is man?* or What constitutes the being of man? All other questions about man point to this one: to a metaphysical *anthropology* (*anthropos* = man; *logos* = study). And this question is related immediately to the question *What is man for?* or What is the end of man?: the metaphysics of *the good* of man (ethics) follows from the metaphysics of man.

The two questions are interrelated. In fact, a good definition of man in the light of his end is: *a bodily person made to know and to love God* (cf. [ch. 21, a](#)). This definition follows from the classical “a rational animal”, as an implication of the rationality of man and its ultimate object.

The metaphysical study of the nature of man helps the Christian to better understand the “elevation” of man to the supernatural life by grace. In fact, philosophical errors concerning the nature of man have had baneful effects on theology and on the moral life, like the Cartesian concept of man as “the ghost in the machine” (a sort of angel inhabiting an animal), which led Descartes to confine

metaphysics to the study of the soul alone, and leave the study of the body to physics alone. This later led to the further confinement of metaphysics to the study of human subjectivity. The Cartesian tendency (cf. [ch. 4, c](#)), which pervades modern philosophy, is to put man in the center of reality, rather than *being*, as we shall see in the history of philosophy.

On the other hand, St. Thomas follows a “theological” order: first, God; then, man; and then, the world. But between God and man he places the angels, to whom he gives a great deal of attention, because they constitute the upper context of man, so to speak, while the material universe is the lower context. Thus, he situates man in his proper context in reality as a whole, and is therefore able to understand him with a truly metaphysical insight. And as we deepen our understanding of the nature of man in his ordination to God we can direct ourselves better to God: know Him and love Him more.

c. Spirit and matter: social sciences and physical sciences

The Cartesian split of body and soul, matter and spirit which has spawned so many problems in modern philosophy is not found in St. Thomas, since for him the difference between matter and spirit is one *of degree*, not of kind, namely the *degree of perfection of being*. Spirit and matter are not two “separate” realities: they are both within being. What happens is that spirit has more actuality of being, it is more than matter.

Descartes, on the other hand, by substituting “human thought” for “being” (*cogito, ergo sum*), and making “clear and distinct ideas” the model for “beings”, divides beings into two irreconcilable realities: matter (*res extensa*) and spirit (*res cogitans*). Later, Kant sees matter as the realm of necessity, and spirit as the realm of freedom, thus sharpening the dichotomy. (See [ch. 47, d](#) and [e](#))

This has given rise to the modern differentiation between; *physical sciences* and *social sciences*. The former, using mathematics as a tool, are more accurate, and thus are considered as a model for the social or human sciences, like sociology, history, economics, etc. Marxism, having completely eliminated the freedom of man by reducing him to his materiality, is attempting this in a most radical fashion (dialectical materialism). (See however [ch. 8, a](#), the need these sciences have of metaphysics, on which they really depend, rather than on the physical sciences.)

d. Order and method of this study

A. Order

1. We begin by looking at man's *specific activity*, as distinct from that of animals: the “knowing” of the latter is confined to the senses, and their “loving” to the emotions; but man, over and above senses and emotions, has intelligence and will.
2. Habits of man, as related to his activity: very important for ethics and for the philosophy of education.
3. The human *soul* in the light of its operations.
4. The human *person*: very important for theology.
5. Man in his *social* nature: as related to other men.
6. Man in his *temporal succession*: history.
7. Man in his activity of *perfecting* other things: the philosophy of work.

All this is an overview of man in himself and in relation to other creatures, after which we can consider him in relation to God: the metaphysics of the end of man, i.e. ethics.

B. Method

It simply consists in approaching human nature by studying the acts of man, which are the fruits of that nature: “by their fruits, you shall know them” (*operari sequitur esse*). The nature of man is very definite, stable and permanent; it shows astonishing regularity, but it has a tremendous richness of being, truly divine traits which have fascinated all true philosophers. This grandeur of man stands up against the backdrop of all the other creatures of the material universe, which man can dominate and subject through his intelligence and will.

What are the traces of man, the specific works of man, the works that only man can do?

(i) Rational construction and organization of things in order to accomplish ends: the whole world of arts and crafts and manufacturing and industry...

(ii) Articulate sounds as distinct from animal noises: man seems to have much more to express than mere emotions...

(iii) Written signs for the same purpose: the transmission of thought...

(iv) Permanent institutions corresponding to the permanent nature of man: the family, civil society, laws...

(v) A most universal human phenomenon: religion or the worship of God (animals have no religion)...

The idea is to look at these typically human phenomena in order to gather what is essential in human nature, ignoring what is only incidental or circumstantial, such as the so-called cultural traits. Cultural anthropology, if it confines itself to just accumulate factual data of different peoples, has a very limited scope of observation (see [ch. 10, b](#)). What we want is to discover what the nature of *man* as such is, i.e. what man is as a being, in relation to his fellow creatures and in relation to the “Subsistent To Be” (God), who is the principle or beginning of man, and the end of man and of every creature.

e. Man as spiritual and corporeal creature

What, then, is the *specific* behavior of man? Man performs many kinds of activities, but what is specific in him is the “spiritual” activity of understanding and making free choices. By his acts of willing with a free mastery over it, by his dominion over all other human activities, and by his understanding, man is essentially different from animals: he has a degree of life which is more perfect. This degree of life, proper to man, is called the *spiritual* life: spiritual, not only in the sense of “religious”, but of super-material or independent from all material conditions.

This human degree of life occupies a definite position in the *hierarchy of the actuality of being*: man is neither pure spirit nor pure matter, but a compound of both. Thus, human nature contains in itself *in a more perfect way* all the perfections of material bodies, plants and animals (see [ch. 15, b](#)); and he has them for the sake of, or at the service of this spiritual life. Human life is, therefore, an order of perfections wherein the lower is for the sake of the higher. The unity of human life is not like the simplicity of God (cf. [ch. 23, b](#)), but a *unity of composition* and a hierarchy of perfections.

Consequently, the creatures below man are also for the sake of man and at his service. That is why man can *possess* them and *use* them, although always according to justice, i.e. taking into account the needs of other men, both individual and social (economic liberalism puts no limits to the right of private ownership, which is wrong: see [ch. 43, c](#)).

However, while man is at the top of the material universe, he is at the bottom of the spiritual universe. Above him are the pure spirits (angels), and above the angels is God, who has the infinitely perfect degree of spiritual life. The spiritual creatures (angels and men) have a specially direct ordination to God. Every creature is made *to give glory to God*, which means, so to speak, to prove God right, i.e. to behave according to God's design. Bodily creatures give glory to God by being

at the service of the spiritual creatures. But the latter give glory to God directly, because they can reach God through their own activities of knowing and loving in a spiritual or intellectual sense. This is why they are the *image and likeness* of God: they reflect God in their knowing and loving.

St. Thomas says that every man has the power to know God by himself, and thereby to love God; and not only the power but the actual exercise, since God can and should be known by the natural light of reason. When man receives grace, he is further enlightened and empowered to know and love God; and when he dies, this power reaches its maximum. Man is, thus, the image of God both on the natural level and on the supernatural level of grace, and then of glory.

We can also see this special ordination of the spiritual creature to God in that

- (i) the human soul is directly created by God (cf. [ch. 24, e](#));
- (ii) the end of human life is God Himself (cf. [b.](#) above);
- (iii) God moves man in every one of his acts (cf. [ch. 18, d](#));
- (iv) only God can penetrate into the human conscience (cf. [ch.](#)

[24, f](#)).

Because of his spirituality, then, man has the capacity to be elevated to the supernatural life. This capacity is called *obediential potency*; man has no capacity to “elevate himself”, but to *be elevated* by grace. No nature can rise above itself, but man has the power to be raised. This power, however, lies not in the materiality of man, but in his spirituality.

After this elevation, therefore, the entire human nature and its operations in relation to other beings in the universe, should be at the service of the supernatural life (cf. [ch. 6, c](#)).

f. Human activity

Since potency and act are really distinct, as we saw in metaphysics, intelligence *as a power* is distinct from intelligence *as an activity*. Thus, a child who has not reached the age of reason is already a human person because he has the power or potency of understanding; but since he does not have yet the actual use of it, he is not *responsible*, and the law protects him, and bars him from doing certain acts which require responsibility. Nevertheless, children have rights that must be respected: their parents are responsible for them.

Since man is not perfect by the mere fact of being a man, he needs to perfect himself: he develops himself towards his good. At the beginning of his being, man is good by the fact that *he is*; but this is not

his ultimate perfection. He acquires the latter by means of his *activity*, and this is what makes him good in the strict sense: attaining his end or perfection. Human acts are indeed accidents, since they do not exist by themselves, but they are *essential* accidents (cf. [ch. 13, f, in, fine](#)), because they flow from the essence of man and perfect; man in his essence, in his being.

Part of the dignity of man consists in his freedom to reach; his perfection: he has to decide by himself. And in the order of grace, he has to *cooperate*. If he does not want to, he will not reach his perfection. Man, as a created being, is not *finished*: he needs to act in order to reach his end (*finis* in Latin). Man is not his own end, but has his end outside himself. This end is God, to whom man relates and ordains himself. Failure to do this is a metaphysical disorder and the only real failure of man. This disorder does not destroy the substance of man, but prevents him from reaching his perfection and thereby his happiness. This is *sin*: the only real evil (cf. [ch. 19, g](#)).

The History of Modern Philosophy

a. The Modernity movement

As we said, *modo* in Latin means “now: hence *modernus* or modern. There is nothing special about “being modern” we are all in fact “modern”, since we are alive “now”. But the way they began to use this term in the 14th century had a very special connotation: it implied a *rejection* of what had been *received* from the immediate past. Man felt self-sufficient, and unwilling to acknowledge any indebtedness: he wanted to: find things out by himself rather than being taught, like the child who is too proud to ask for help.

Among other things, the Renaissance was a time of economic prosperity (new lands to be exploited, new sources of raw materials, new markets, new techniques of production, inventions like the printing press and gunpowder...) with an increasing urge to enjoy the pleasures of life and to look down on the recent past, which could not be easily accepted as a teacher. Those “moderns” felt that they had nothing to learn from their forebears, that *now* is better than *yesterday*. This is typical of modern philosophy: a contempt for the past which is self-defeating, since it dooms itself to be despised in turn by tomorrow's present.

Specifically, modern philosophy largely rejects the Christian faith, with its *supernatural* knowledge, as something *given* to man, *received* by man, which the pride of man finds it hard to accept: “modern” man wants to find out by himself, rather than being “spoon-fed” by God, let alone by the Church. He wants to construct his *own* ideas about God and about the Church, rather than *depend* on a knowledge handed on by forebears. Of course, *traditionalism* or the blind and unthinking acceptance of tradition for its own sake, is as wrong as this foolish *progressivism*. But progressivism is usually stronger because it's more destructive.

In the Renaissance, along with an upsurge of artistic and scientific creativity, there was a shift away *from the faith and supernatural knowledge* to reason and natural knowledge: the germs of the subsequent rationalism and naturalism associated with the humanist ideals of Freemasonry. This is why there was a “revival” of pagan philosophy and culture, accompanied by a movement of independence from the faith by rejecting its guidance, as the temporal power of secular rulers became more self-assertive in relation to the

Church. They wanted *reason* to go on its own: why should reason be guided by the faith? This is the spirit of modern philosophy.

A second thing that was rejected was the dependence of human reason on *being*, i.e. on reality outside reason: the “active” intellect took over from the “contemplative” intellect. Thus, *modernitas* or “modernity”, as they called the movement, rejected (i) the past, (ii) the faith, and (iii) eventually reality itself (“idealism”); in short, anything that would “teach” them anything. Man wanted to find the whole truth *out of himself* and *by himself*: neither God, nor the Church, nor the world, nor history should teach me; I am the one to find the truth by myself.

For “modernity”, therefore, philosophy no longer consists in contemplating *the reality created by God* and drawing therefrom the rules for human conduct (cf. [ch. 34, c](#)), but in providing *power for man to master the world* and use it for his own happiness.

b. Humanism

This approach ends up in *immanentism* (see [ch. 21, j](#)): a philosophy which begins and ends in man, remains in man (*immanere* = to remain in). It is the philosophy of human egoism, of the individualism characteristic of Protestantism and Liberalism.

It means also that every man has to start his own philosophy: he should not “receive” what others have *thought out*. This is *the reason* for the proliferation of philosophical systems ever since (parallel to the proliferation of Protestant sects). These systems are all quite impressive as a rule, but characteristically separated from reality, since they want to subjugate it rather than accept it. They are full of subjectivity, wilfulness, imagination and emotion, but as dangerous to man and society as fiction is separated from real life.

Thus, it can also be called *humanism*, in the sense that all reality is reduced to, and centered in man. This humanism then splits into (i) *individualistic* humanism — “the only thing that matters is myself”: man applies to himself the divine definition I AM WHO AM; and (ii) *collectivistic* humanism — “the only thing that matters is man”, i.e. the ideal man, the collective man, society as such.

Liberalism leading to anarchism is the former; socialism leading to communism is the latter. Their common root is a humanism that has rejected God and has humanized everything, including religion. Nothing *transcends* man: hence immanence or immanentism, which is the opposite of transcendence (cf. [ch. 5, a](#)).

This process of humanization of culture and philosophy was aided, as we have observed, by the decadence of a christian

philosophy in the throes of *formalism*. Once the philosophy of St. Thomas is turned into a formalism, i.e. into a *system* of ideas, it loses its congenital realism. What St. Thomas was all the time *looking at* was reality, i.e. the reality created by God and visible through the senses. But what other philosophers look at is ideas *in their own minds*, and end up confusing them with reality, and thinking that reality including God, is a creation of the human mind (cf. [ch. 8, d](#)).

c. Modern Philosophy and the Church

Contact with modern philosophy, therefore, requires in the Christian a great sense of fidelity to the Church and its teaching authority, realizing the deeply anti-christian beginnings of it. No one is free from the temptations of modern thought, as no one is free from selfish passion and pride: personal piety and humility are essential, as well as sincere obedience to the *magisterium* of the Church.

Modern philosophy, however, cannot be ignored by the christian, since otherwise he is in great danger of being deceived by it, as it pervades the means of social communication and the world of education and culture. The Church has denounced its errors (while never denying its achievements) many times, as in the *Syllabus* issued by Pius IX in 1864; in the I Vatican Council of 1869-70; in the many encyclicals of Leo XIII, particularly *Aeterni Patris* (1879); in the encyclical *Pascendi* of St. Pius X (1907), condemning *modernism* as a compendium of heresies stemming from modern philosophy; in the encyclical *Humani generis* of Pius XII (1950); down to Paul VI, who spoke several times about “neo-modernism”, and John Paul II, who in a recent homily (I-IX-1979) stated that “a culture that is deliberately anti-metaphysical, logically produces an agnostic and neo-pagan society, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts of honest persons, concerned about the destiny of mankind”. Besides, Pius XI condemned marxist communism — a typical product of modern philosophy — as a totalitarian philosophy based on atheism in the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* (1937).

The approach” of the Church, however, has not been confined to exposing and condemning errors: she has in fact gone to the limit in taking pains to welcome whatever truth and wisdom and goodness there is still in modern philosophy, whatever genuine humanism is still in conformity with the Christian and metaphysical conception of man as *imago Dei*, as attested by such documents as the encyclical *Pacem in terns* of John XXIII (1963); the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, first of Paul VI's Pontificate (1964); the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of the II Vatican Council (1965); and above all the first encyclical of

d. René Descartes (1596-1650)

Descartes is the first important modern philosopher. In him and Kant are most characteristically found all the features of modern thought. This is why we shall concentrate on these two, referring the reader to any standard History for all the rest (see Bibliography).

Descartes' chief work is the *Discourse on Method*, whose starting point is the rejection of all *received* knowledge, whether from the *faith*, from the *past*, or from the *senses* (see a and b). This leaves me *alone with my thought*: I *am* thinking, (*cogito* in Latin). So, *cogito* becomes the starting point of philosophy. After having cast the faith, the past and the senses into *doubt*, *cogito* becomes the first *certainty*. But “doubt” and “certainty” are two subjective states of the mind. Therefore, philosophy becomes *subjective thinking*, centered on man, no longer on reality. The only certainty I have, says Descartes, is that I am thinking. Therefore, this has to be the beginning of philosophy, and it means that my being is *thinking*: it is by thinking that I am (in Latin, *cogito, ergo sum*). This is the essence of modern philosophy: making human thought ' the center of reality, subjectifying reality.

Previously, Protestantism had subjectified the *faith*. Descartes was now subjectifying *reason*: the humanist trend (see [ch. 44, b](#)). The tide has not stopped ever since, despite all the efforts of the Church to make man return to God as the only foundation and guarantor of a genuine humanism that truly loves man and respects his dignity and rights. A great deal of doctrine, piety and humility is needed not to be swept by this tide.

From the *cogito*, Descartes proceeds to “prove” the existence of God. He could not do so, as St. Thomas does, by starting from sense experience (cf. [ch. 21](#) and [22](#)), as he had cast all sense knowledge into doubt: he was *sure* only of his own thinking, not of *what* the thinking was about but of the thinking itself. Descartes is sure only of *himself*. And how does he prove that God exists then? He says: I have the *innate idea* of the most perfect being; but I am *not* the most perfect being; therefore there must be a most perfect being who has put this idea into my mind. (This, however, does not prove anything: St. Thomas had already rejected this kind of argument saying that from an “idea” one cannot prove the existence of anything *in reality*; in order to do this, one has to start from reality itself, not from an “idea” in the mind.)

Many philosophers after Descartes rejected his argument for the existence of God, while fully accepting his *subjective starting point*

and ending up either in agnosticism or in downright atheism.

Regarding man, Descartes also runs into difficulties. Since he has put into doubt what he receives through the senses, how do we know that we have a body? We feel our body *through the senses*: therefore, I have to doubt the existence of my body, I cannot be *sure* of it. On the other hand, I *am* sure that I am thinking: therefore, my thinking must be something different from my body, namely the *soul*, the “spiritual” soul as distinct from the “material” body. What I am sure of, therefore, is that *I am a soul*, and that the being of my soul is *thinking*: my thinking is my being (cf. [ch. 25, b](#), and [c](#)).

And what about my body? I will have to “prove” whether it exists or not, and I have to prove this through “ideas”, through thinking. He “proves” it in this way: in my sensations I feel *passive*, i.e. at the receiving end. I cannot change them at will: I *receive* them. Consequently, there must be something *outside* me that *causes* my sensations, and this can only be either God or the things themselves. But the “most perfect being” would not “deceive” me by making me feel that there are things outside me which would not in fact exist. And so, it must be the things themselves that cause my sensations of them.

Thus, he “proves” the existence of the world outside himself by means of the *idea* of “cause”, which presumably must be *innate* too. He thereby inverts the natural order of things by “proving” what is most evident (the world) through what is less evident (an idea in my mind): another manifestation of his subjectivism. This Cartesian theory also came under fire from many subsequent philosophers, but they all likewise retained the subjective immanentistic starting point.

What is man, then, for Descartes? A spirit and a body neatly dichotomized and essentially different (cf. [ch. 25, b](#) and [c](#)): the latter is nothing but *extension*, and the former is pure *thought*. Man is a “ghost in a machine”: this is the Cartesian idea of man, already at odds with Christianity and with the metaphysics of *esse* (cf. Appendix to, and *passim* in metaphysics of man). Descartes splits man into two: instead of distinguishing in order to unite (cf. [ch. 46, e](#)), he separates or dichotomizes. This is also a consequence of his subjectivism, which makes him accept ideas *only if they are* “*clear and distinct*” (like mathematical ideas), because only they beget “certainty” *in the mind*: truth is not what matters, but certainty. This is what leads him to *reduce* the idea of spirit to “thought”, and the idea of matter to “extension”.

How then do soul and body *communicate* in man if they exclude each other so sharply, so mathematically? The soul is “active” and “qualitative”; the body is “passive” and “quantitative”. How can they communicate with each other? Here he turns to philosophy-fiction: contradicting his own principle of accepting only “clear and

distinct ideas”, he turns to a nebulous theory according to which there are certain vapors, called “animal spirits” (sic), through which body and soul communicate, and which are emitted by the “pineal gland” in the brain, because this gland is the only asymmetrical point of the human body! (this is a standard joke in the history of philosophy) Of course, nobody accepted this “theory”, but again, most thinkers have accepted his subjective starting point, branching off then into either *idealism* (all is thought) or *materialism* (all is matter).

Lastly, Cartesian ethics can be summarized in three principles:

- (i) Reason can know God and all that is in man (rationalism).
- (ii) The only virtue we should practise is firmness in following our own reason (voluntarism).
- (iii) We should not wish what is impossible, and should not repent from our errors (humanism).

e. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

After Descartes, there were two schools of thought. One was a rationalism which understood “reason” as intelligence, and the other was a rationalism which identified “reason” with sensibility (empiricism): the former was inclined to idealism, and the latter to materialism, but both stemmed from the same Cartesian principle of immanence (*cogito*). Let us recall the Cartesian dichotomy of man:

Man	
Body	
Intelligence	
Rationalism	
(ideas come from man)	
empiricism (ideas come from outside)	
Descartes, Malebranche, Berkeley, Wolff.	

For both wings of Cartesianism, however, ideas come from man: both agree that all that exists is *given* to man *in his consciousness*, in his thinking; but while for rationalists “thinking” is abstract thinking (rational consciousness), for empiricists “thinking” is feeling and imagining (sensible consciousness).

What Kant attempted was a synthesis of both. Thus, he constructed a theory of knowledge leashed on a “critique” of all the knowing powers of man.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he made a critique of “sensibility”, “understanding” and “reason”. He also dichotomizes or splits man into those three knowing powers, the lowest of which is “sensibility”, above which is “understanding”, and at the top is

“reason”. His approach is, therefore, wrong from the start, because in man “knowing” is a *single unified process*, not three different steps: sensibility and understanding, as we have seen in the Metaphysics of Man, are distinct but not separated, united but not confused (see [ch. 26](#) and [27](#)).

Kant's chief concern was to discover the ground of scientific knowledge, i.e. knowledge which is *universal* and *necessary* (as opposed to particular and contingent). For empiricism, all our knowledge is particular and contingent, because we cannot generalize from sense impressions, and so there is no ground for any scientific statement. Kant, as a rationalist, confronted the empiricists by countering that there are two sciences which for him were, beyond any doubt, universal and necessary, namely Physics and Ethics. The propositions or statements of both these sciences are, he observed, universal and necessary, but at the same time, they are *based on sensible experience*, as the physics of Newton and the ethics of Rousseau demonstrate. (Newton's physics is all based on experiment and observation, but its conclusions are universal and necessary. Rousseau's ethics was purely subjective: I must be true “to myself”, I must do what *I feel* is right: a man-centered ethics, but nevertheless “universal and necessary”, i.e. intended for every man necessarily.)

Now, if universality and necessity cannot come from sense experience (in this, Kant agreed with the empiricists), i.e. from *outside* the mind, it must come from *inside* the mind: it must be precisely the contribution our mind makes to our knowledge. Therefore, our knowledge is a *synthesis* of (i) data from outside the mind, and (ii) the mind's own *forms* or empty mental moulds into which the data are cast and thus *objectified* for the mind. While (i) is the “matter” or content of our knowledge, (ii) is the “form” of it. Kant calls the purely mental element (which does not come from experience) *a priori*, and so speaks of the “a priori forms” inherent in the mind, *prior* to any experience, similar to the “innate ideas” of Descartes, but without *content*.

On the other hand, what does come from experience is *a posteriori* and supplies the *content* of our knowledge, which is then synthesized with the a priori forms, and thereby becomes “universal and necessary”. Thus, the mind *adapts* reality to itself or “objectifies” it into “phenomena” (i.e. things *as they appear* to the mind), while the “noumenon” (i.e. the “thinkable”) or what the thing is *in itself* remains unknown.

This *agnosticism* leads Kant to conclude that we cannot know what is beyond our sense experience, such as the “world as a totality”, the “soul”, and “God”. These are the three “pure ideas” of “reason”, beyond “understanding”, which cannot be synthesized with any sense

experience, and about which therefore we can know nothing. Thus, with Kant, human consciousness encloses itself within itself more radically by excluding any *knowledge of* things in themselves. Post-Kantian idealism went on to exclude even the *existence* of things in themselves: reality becomes a creation of man.

For Kant, the “a priori forms” of “sensibility” are *space* and *time*. Those of “understanding” are what he calls the twelve “categories” or “concepts”, with which we “unify” our sense perceptions into “universal and necessary statements”, such as the concept of *cause*, which is therefore *valid only when applied to observable phenomena*. This is why, according to him, we cannot prove the existence of God as the “cause” of the world with “pure reason” alone, since “God” is beyond sense experience. For Kant, as we said, “God” (like “world” and “soul”) is a pure “a priori form” or “idea” of “reason”, with no counterpart in sense experience. Those “pure ideas of reason” are no more than the “forms” with which we unify all our experiences: the external ones into the idea of “world”; the internal ones into the idea of “soul”; and all of them into the idea of “God”.

In his second “critique”, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant surpasses the conclusions of the first one. Here he turns his attention to ethics. In the first critique, he had concluded that while physics is possible as a science because of its *sensible* content, metaphysics, on the other hand, has no basis *as a science*: it is only a “natural disposition” of our mind trying to. unify all experience.

Ethics, however, Kant claims, can be a basis for metaphysics (the very opposite of what we have been saying all the while, especially in [ch. 10](#) and [34](#)), because the statements of ethics are “categorical imperatives”: “I must do this”, “I must avoid that” and so forth. And they are universal and necessary, as they are meant to be valid *for anyone in that situation*. Therefore, they are *a priori*, but also *synthetic* (like the propositions of physics), i.e. with a *sensible* content, since the empirical ego who *feels* those imperatives is also sensible. Here is, then, another valid science.

Now, if these moral propositions are true, i.e. “objective”, they imply the existence of (i) God, because there must be someone who rewards and punishes, or otherwise there would be no necessity in those categorical imperatives; and (ii) the soul, both *free* (the imperatives are “unconditioned”, hence the soul must be unconditioned, as opposed to the body, which is “necessitated”) and *immortal*, since virtue is not always rewarded in this life, and vice not always punished, and so the soul must survive the body.

Consequently, Kant considers God and the soul as “postulates of practical reason”: what “pure” reason is unable to do, namely to reach a *noumenon* (God and the soul in this case), “practical” reason

does with its moral categorical imperatives. Practical reason is “autonomous” (*auto* = self; *nomos* = law), i.e. it *dictates* the law, while pure reason is “heteronomous”, i.e. it *receives* the law from outside itself. So, practical reason is the realm of *freedom*, while pure reason is the realm of *necessity*.

This means that morality is not rooted in metaphysics but *in the very structure of the human mind*. The post-Kantian idealists would make the human mind not only the root of morality but the creator of everything, and the marxists would make revolutionary *praxis* not only the creator of everything but the criterion of truth. This is the sequel of both the Kantian *separation* of “practical” and “pure” reason, and the *inversion of their natural sequence*: in order to *act* (practical reason) we must *know* (“pure” or speculative reason) (cf. [ch. 6, c](#), and [38, f](#)), but in Kant and in Marxism this natural order is inverted.

Lastly, in his third “critique”, the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant looks for a “source” that would unify the two “reasons”, and thus unite the world of necessity (physics) and the world of freedom (ethics): something deeper than either “pure” or “practical” reason, namely the human “spirit” (*Geist*). And he finds an avenue into it in what he calls *feeling*, thus showing the deep influence of his contemporary *romantic* poets and artists, like Goethe, who exalted the boundless freedom of feeling and rebelled against the law-abiding necessity of reason. This was the transition from rationalism to romanticism, from the cult of reason to the cult of feeling, but always within *immanentism*, always starting from the Cartesian *cogito* or principle of immanence. It ushers in the age of *revolution*, in which we are immersed. In fact, Kant claimed to have accomplished two “copernican revolutions” in philosophy:

(i) It is not the mind that rotates around reality, but the other way round.

(ii) It is not action (practical reason) that follows knowledge (pure reason), but the other way round.

PART VI

Ethics

CHAPTER 34

Introduction

a. Metaphysics of the end and of the moral order

What is the object of the metaphysics of the “end” or of the “good” or of the “moral order”? This is the metaphysical study of the *end of man* and of *human acts* in so far as they are related to that end. This science is called *ethics*, from the Greek *ethos*, which means “habit” or “custom”. It is also called *morals*, from the Latin *mos* (plural: *mores*), which means “custom”, in the sense of natural inclination to act with an *intention*, i.e. with a direction to an end.

Why is morals or ethics part of metaphysics? Because the rule (standard) of moral actions is the end of man, but “end” is the good or perfection of being (cf. [ch. 19, e](#)). Ethics studies human actions both in their inner order and in their order to the end of man, or in other words, *how man should live in order to attain his end*. Human actions are the object of ethics in so far as they are ordained to the end of man, not in their physical reality: their “moral being” is determined by their relationship to the end of man.

b. Free actions

Since man is free by nature, as we saw in [ch. 30](#), only free actions are “human” and thereby “moral”. A “free action”, says St. Thomas, is *an action of which man is the master*. The actions of which man is not the master are not “human” actions, even though they may happen to be performed by a man. “Free” means *conscious* and *willing*; man is the owner of that action: he can “own” that action and say “It is my responsibility”. This is because, as we have seen, man directs himself to his end freely, not in the sense that he chooses his natural end out of his own judgment, but in that he conducts or directs himself to it by his own determination. We can therefore say that the two basic topics of ethics are:

- (i) The end of man: objective aspect of morality.
- (ii) The freedom of man: subjective aspect.

We shall develop this point in [ch. 39, a](#).

c. *Ethics as part of metaphysics*

Is ethics part of metaphysics on account of its material or of its formal object? (cf. [ch. 25, a](#)). Let us recall that metaphysics studies “being as such”: the entire reality is its material object; but it focuses on “being as such” precisely as its formal object, so that the metaphysical outlook consists in looking at things in their being. Thus, if we look at human, actions in their being, i.e. in their ultimate ordination to the end or perfection of their being, we are looking at them metaphysically.

Therefore, the “material” object of ethics is “human: action”; but it looks at them in their being, and so, ethics is metaphysics by its “formal” object, because it studies an aspect of “being as such”, which is the good of human actions.

As part of metaphysics, then, ethics is rational philosophy, just as “natural theology” is also natural philosophy. However, just as natural theology has continuity with “supernatural theology”, ethics too has continuity in the supernatural order with moral theology, which, as supernatural

theology, raises ethics to the supernatural order with the enlightenment of faith. But moral theology finds a necessary instrument in the metaphysics of the moral order (see [ch. 2, c](#)).

Regarding the “material” object of ethics, we said it is “human actions” or free human acts, but we should add that these human acts can be studied not only in the person as such, but also in the context of society, both family and civil society (social ethics).

And as we saw in [ch. 25, c](#), ethics is the foundation of all the sciences about man or “social sciences”.

d. *Ethical science and moral uprightness*

In order to study ethics, one needs to have the right moral dispositions, which are not so much required for the study of other sciences which are not “human” or *sapiential*, like metaphysics or theology (cf. [ch. 6, d](#)). A person who is not morally upright studies physics, chemistry, biology, etc., and this does not *per se* affect the studies; but in ethics it does: one has to be morally attuned to it, because each science requires the adequate proportion between the student and the object of the science, which in this case is the *good* of man.

Moral science is not only “speculative” (i.e. ordained to the acquisition of a stable knowledge), but also “practical” (i.e. ordained to action, namely rational or meaningful action). But, like every “practical”

science, it is based on a “speculative” science: “practice” is based on “theory” (see [ch. 6, c](#)). “Science” strictly speaking is “speculative”: “practical” science is rather “technique” or “art”. Besides, the practicality of ethics affects human behavior: we apply this science to ourselves by means of the intellectual habit of “prudence”. Dealing with “conscience” ([ch. 38](#)), the “intellectual habits” are classified into five: three speculative (first principles, science, wisdom) and two practical (technique or art, which applies to *facere*; and prudence, which applies to *agere*: see [ch. 33, d](#)).

e. Order of this study

As we have seen in metaphysics, the difference between “created being” and “uncreated being” is that the latter *is* the fulness of being, while the former is “participated” (cf. [ch. 16, a](#)). Therefore, created being is not perfect: it is “unfinished” or ordained to an end. The good of created being, then, is a “good of order”, namely the *order to the end*. Thus, it is not good except in so far as it moves towards the end, which is; the “final” cause. This “good of order” of created being is its ordination to God, as Last End of all being. When man loses this ordination, he falls away from his good, thus damaging both himself and society: the “evil of disorder” replaces the “good of order”.

The logical sequence of our study is therefore:

(i) God as the *total end* of man (not as the First Cause of all being, which is the object of natural theology); and the *happiness of man*, which consists in the final attainment of this, last end.

(ii) The *common good*, i.e. the good of society and of the universe as a whole, because man is part both of the universe and of society.

(iii) The *objective rule of morality*, i.e. the moral law or “natural law”, as derived from the end of man; and the *subjective rule of morality*, i.e. the “conscience” of man, whereby man applies the objective rule to his own individual acts.

(iv) The way man has to follow to reach his end or good, i.e. the *moral acts*, and specifically the defective moral act, namely *sin*; and the role of the *dispositions* in these acts: *virtues* and *vices*.

The free activity of men as members of the *social community* or ordained to the common good (social ethics).

CHAPTER 39

Moral Acts

a. Will and freedom

As we have seen in [ch. 34, b](#), St. Thomas defines moral acts as the “human acts of which man is the master”, i.e. the *deliberate* human acts of the will or endowed with willfulness.

The *objective* foundation of morality is the ordination to God as last end. Every human act has an ordination to God, whereby it is morally right if it agrees with the Will of God, or morally wrong if it disagrees. But what is the *subjective* foundation of morality? What makes the act moral subjectively speaking, i.e. from the point of view of the subject who performs it? This subject is the person: what does the person need in order to be *responsible* for his act, and so make the act “moral”? He must be *free* or “master of his act”: the act must be deliberate or willful.

Freedom, then, is the subjective foundation of morality. Without freedom, the human act is not moral, even though, objectively speaking it may be related to the moral law: whatever diminishes the freedom or willfulness of human acts, diminishes also their moral value.

The intelligence specifies what should be done, but it is the will that moves to action. In this sense, man should want the good always (cf. [ch. 29](#)): he should be ordained to the good through his will. If he freely withdraws from the good, he sins. Therefore, the decisive factor is the will. That is why the will is regarded as the faculty of man closest to his own self. Each man must ordain himself, by himself, to the end. This consists essentially in a *conversion* to God, to be sustained, or remade if it has been lost.

Now, what are the characteristics of the voluntary act? First of all, it has to be *conscious*, i.e. with full advertence. Can *physical violence* destroy the willfulness of an act? To answer this, we have to distinguish two types of acts of the will (see [ch. 29, g](#)):

(i) *Elicited* acts: flowing directly from the will; also called “decisions”.

(ii) *Commanded* acts: performed by other faculties of man but at the command of the will.

Physical violence can only interfere with the second type of

acts. No force whatever can overcome the will itself in its decisions, unless the will consents.

Can *ignorance* diminish the willfulness of an act? Yes, as long as the ignorance is not *willed in itself*: one may choose not to find out about something (e.g. whether it is forbidden by the law or not) so as to avoid responsibility, in which case the ignorance is willful.

Can *passions* or emotions affect the morality of our actions? They undoubtedly have an influence, but to what extent can they act on the will? It depends on the will itself, since man is free, as we saw in [ch. 30](#). Since passions are rooted in the bodily organs (cf. [ch. 29, a](#)), man, with his will, can act on his senses so as to thereby restrain his passions, for example by restraining his imagination or his memory (cf. [ch. 27, a](#)).

On the other hand, passions can increase both the goodness and the malice of actions if the will channels them in that direction, whether preceding or accompanying the act of the will itself. For example, to love God with passion or passionately increases the consequent merit, and so does to hate sin passionately (cf. [ch. 29, g](#)).

b. Goodness and malice of human 'acts'

The goodness or malice of human acts depends on the fullness of being ("being and good are interchangeable": cf. [ch. 19, e](#)) of those human acts, i.e. on how related or close they are to their end. This is what is referred to as the *sources of morality*, i.e. the criteria to determine the morality of the human act in terms of its relationship to the end. St. Thomas (*Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18) mentions three "sources of morality": (i) the "object" (*finis operis* = end of the action); (ii) the "circumstances"; (iii) the "end" (*finis operantis* = end or intention of the agent).

First is the "object", because the end of the action *specifies* the action: it means not just the physical or material entity of the action, but the action in so far as it is *ordained to a good or to a bad end*, and wanted by the will to be that way. It is human reason that regulates the action by knowing the good to be done and the evil to be avoided. And to the extent that it is wanted by the will, it becomes *the finis operantis*.

The "object" can sometimes be taken up by a higher object, e.g. doing an act of justice for the love of God, in which case the action has a double moral value, either for good or for evil. And regarding the relationship between *finis operis* and *finis operantis*, it is clear that a "*good intention*" *cannot make a bad action good* (the end does not justify the means), although it can make a good action better. On the other hand, a bad intention can make a good action bad, and a bad

action worse. But it is also true that even though in theory there could be “morally indifferent actions”, such as walking or running, taking into account that there is always an intention in the agent, *in practice or in fact there are no morally indifferent human actions*.

As for the circumstances, there is a classical division into seven: *quis* (who), *quid* (what), *ubi* (where), *quibus auxiliis* (with what aids), *cur* (why), *quomodo* (how), *quando* (when). The *quid* and the *cur* should not be confused with the “object” and the “end” respectively: they are only *added* circumstances, i.e. additional modifications in the object or in the motives of the agent.

Lastly, we say that the goodness or malice of human acts is already found in the *internal* act of the will, even if it is not exteriorized. However, the *external* act can manifest the intensity of the internal act, and thus increase its morality for good or evil.

c. Moral evil or sin

As we said, sin is the only evil absolutely speaking, because it is the de-ordination of the created will with respect to God (cf. [ch. 35, e](#)). Every being is ordained to God, but the human will can de-ordinate itself from God, and this is the only thing that is really evil: all other “evils” are not really so (cf. [ch. 35, h](#)).

Created freedom is good, but it has the possibility of *failing*. Why? Because it is not a completed being (it is “participated”): its good consists in being *ordained to its end* and thus being completed; but in this *process*, it can fail, and this failure is sin.

Since evil as such cannot be willed or loved (cf. [ch. 35, g](#)), this de-ordination of sin consists necessarily in a “conversion to creatures”. Thus, the two elements of sin are: (i) *aversio a Deo*: turning away from God, which is *pride*, or the disorderly desire for one’s excellence; and (ii) *conversio ad creaturas*: turning to creatures, which is covetousness or *greed*, manifesting itself in *envy*, *anger*, *lust*, *gluttony*, or *sloth*. There we have the seven “capital sins”, thus called because they are the “heads” of all the others. “Conversion from sin”, therefore, consists in doing the opposite of (i) and (ii) above, with humility and trust. Sin does not separate the creature from God absolutely, since that would be annihilation: rather, it separates man from God to the extent that it depends on man’s freedom.

It is important to note that in every “mortal sin” it is not necessary that one should want to offend God directly: even without the intention to offend God, it is enough to want a created good in preference to God, which is what happens in sins against oneself, one’s neighbor, or the right use of things. Every sin is an offense to

God.

The result of this de-ordination from God is a disorder *in the totality of reality*: (i) an interior disorder in the sinner himself; and (ii) a social disorder. Every sin is social, as well as personal (cf. [ch. 37, h](#)).

To the extent that it is a *falling away* from being, sin disunites and fragments, since “being and one are interchangeable” (cf. [ch. 19, c](#)). Sin is the only evil absolutely speaking, because it takes man away from the fullness of being which is God: it is the risk which God has taken by creating man free.

Let us say lastly that although every sin is voluntary (otherwise it would not be a sin, “formally” speaking), some sins can be less culpable or guilty due to ignorance or weakness. Nevertheless, sins of *weakness* can also be “mortal”; deliberate malice is not necessarily required for a sin to be mortal.

d. Types of sins

Aside from the “capital sins”, just mentioned, we can give the following classifications:

- (i) Sins of omission or commission.
- (ii) Sins in thought, word, or deed.
- (iii) Mortal and venial sins: this is the most important division.

“Mortal” (from Latin *mors* = death) or deadly sin consists in a complete withdrawal from the last end: its penalty, therefore, is the loss or deprivation of God (cf. [ch. 38, e](#)). The conditions for a sin to be mortal are: (i) serious matter; (ii) sufficient knowledge and consciousness; (iii) sufficient consent of the will. If one of these conditions is missing, the sin is venial.

“Venial” sin, on the other hand, is a disorder in relation to the last end, but not to the extent of losing the ordination altogether: it wounds, so to speak, but it does not kill. The placing of an obstacle which makes the attainment of the last end more difficult is the disorder of venial sin: its penalty, therefore, is a delay in attaining the last end, a kind of retrogression from the last end. This is the metaphysical counterpart of the revealed doctrine of *purgatory*.

e. Effects of sin

The principal effects of sin are: (i) a certain corruption of the natural good; (ii) a sort of stain in the soul; (iii) a penalty.

The first is only a “certain corruption”, because the natural good

is not altogether corrupted: it is manifested by the *remorse* of conscience, which shows that the inclination to the good is not lost altogether.

The “stain” is a sort of habit of disorder, which needs a movement in the opposite direction to straighten itself out, as we said in c (conversion): this is what *contrition* or compunction does.

The penalty for mortal sin is *everlasting*, because it is determined by the gravity of the guilt: whoever puts *his last end* in some sin, has the will to sin forever, and therefore deserves as everlasting penalty (cf. [ch. 38, e](#)). The two penalties (“pain of loss” and “pain of punishment”) correspond to the two elements of sin mentioned: to *aversio a Deo*, the loss of God; and to *conversio ad creaturas*, the deprivation of created goods as well.

f. Virtues

In order to do good acts easily and promptly, gladly and naturally, in different circumstances and with different objects, the will needs to perfect itself through certain *stable qualities* which are called virtues.

“Virtue” (from Latin *vis* = strength) empowers the will to act effectively. It is a particular type of quality (cf. [ch. 13, c](#): “quality” is the accident that perfects a being either in itself or in its activity) which inclines the will to good acts (its opposite is called “vice”). This *stable disposition* to perform certain acts is called “habit”. Characteristic of habits is that they are between potency and act: they are in act in relation to the potency they possess, but they are in potency in relation to the full actuality of that potency:

activity		
actency >		
potency >		
(2 nd act)		

Virtues, then, are directed to action, to activity, to operation: they properly belong to the will only, since the will is the power of activity. We may speak of “virtue” in relation to other faculties (e.g. “intellectual virtues”) but always in reference to the will, which is the “queen” of all the faculties of man (cf. [ch. 29, g](#)).

Natural virtues are those which man can acquire by his proper operation: they are acquired (i.e. not inborn) by insisting on the corresponding acts until they become a habit. And the same way they are acquired, they can be diminished or even lost by not insisting on

those acts.

The characteristic of these “natural” virtues, as Aristotle observed, is that they consist in a “mean between two extremes”, which are either by excess or by default to the extent that they deviate from the good end. In relation to the end itself, however, there is no “mean”, as there can be no “excess”: we cannot “love God excessively”, although we can fall short of that love.

All the virtues are related to one another, as they are all rooted in the will, as we have seen: the will has a last end to which all other ends should be directed (cf. [ch. 36, a](#)). This means that there is order in virtues: they are subordinated, connected and coordinated. What is then the order of perfection? Which are the higher virtues? Virtues are higher, the closer or the more directly related they are to the last end. Therefore, the highest among the natural virtues is the love of God (supernatural virtues are those *infused* in man by God with supernatural grace: the highest is Charity, the supernatural love of God).

g. Types of virtues

The natural virtues are also called *moral virtues* (although they are distinguished from the supernatural moral virtues, which are infused), because they affect the activity of the will, which is always moral, and also to distinguish them from the “intellectual virtues”, which are the habits of the intelligence (cf. [ch. 38, f](#)).

The highest moral virtue, the love of God, is called *religion*: it directs man to the fulfillment of the first commandment of the natural law (cf. [ch. 38, d](#)). It should be practiced with both interior and exterior acts of adoration and thanksgiving, prayer and sacrifice, which give God the glory which is *due* to Him by the creature to the Creator.

Next, we have the *cardinal virtues* (from Latin *cardo* = hinge): all other virtues turn around them, so to speak:

(i) *Prudence* — the regulation of the activity itself of the will, so that it is in accordance with reason (it is also, therefore, an “intellectual habit”: *recta ratio agibilium*).

(ii) *Justice* — regulation of the activity of man in relation to others: it consists in giving each what is due to him.

(iii) *Fortitude* — regulation of the “irascible” emotions (cf. [ch. 29, a](#)): directed to a good which is *difficult* to attain.

(iv) *Temperance* — regulation of the “concupiscible” emotions (cf. [ch. 29, a](#)), i.e. those directed to the good as *enjoyable*.

Lastly, we can recall here, by contrast, the “capital sins” or

“cardinal vices” (see c): pride (*aversio a Deo*) and greed (*conversio ad creaturas*), and their sequels: envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth (the latter is the most subtle rationalization of pride: a kind of disgust with everything divine, the “sour grapes” that would “justify” giving up every attempt to move towards the last end, and pave the way for the sin of despair).

CHAPTER 35

Good and Evil

a. *The good*

“Things are good in so far as they are” (St. Thomas). Let us analyze this statement. What is it “to be”? What is *better*, “to be” or “not to be”? There is an infinite difference between the two. But also, “to be better” is *better* than “to be good”, and “to be best” better than “to be better”. “To be” is infinitely better than “not to be”, because “good” is the perfection of being. There are things which are more perfect than others, because their end is higher; but in so far as anything *is*, it is good, because it has reached an end. It may, of course, have still to reach a higher end: it can be better; but in so far as it is something already, it is good. It is better to be, even if it is not “best”, than not to be at all. Of course, it is more important to finish than to start, but sometimes the “best” can be the enemy of the “good”, as when waiting for optimum opportunities that may never come, or preventing human life from coming into existence because of the difficulties involved. There are, therefore, degrees of good, just as there are degrees of being (cf. [ch. 17, d](#)).

The fulness of being, the *Esse* of God is the highest degree of goodness: it is goodness itself (cf. [ch. 23, d](#)). On the other hand, the *esse* that has been “received” by a potency which limits it, is thereby limited by the essence (cf. [ch. 16](#)): it is therefore good in so far as it is, but it is not goodness itself but only by participation. To be more precise, it is good on account of its act of being, or how much it *actually* is, because what a being is in potency does not count for its effective *value* (“value” = amount of good).

Which is more “valuable”, for instance, a doctor or a medical student? A doctor, because a medical student may *potentially* be a better doctor, but not actually: effective being is only actual being; a thing is good as far as its actuality goes. Potential being is good only in relation to its actuality, not in itself.

b. *Participated beings have a good end or purpose*

The Being Who is Pure Act is Goodness Itself. Therefore He has no end to attain outside Himself. He has no end: He is *the* End (see [ch. 24, c](#)).

On the other hand, what in God is one, in the creature it is divided: the goodness of the creature is fragmented, and needs to complete itself by means of activities and accidents, so as to acquire its complete perfection, its final perfection.

The creature is, therefore, good, but it can be better all the time until it reaches its end. Now, since the good of the creature is its end, the goodness of the creature lies in its *ordination* to its end.

c. The final good moves beings

How does the end motivate the creature? We have seen that what is, is good, and the fulness of being is the fulness of good. What is therefore good, is valuable and desirable. It is in that sense that it motivates us, because we see a *value* in it and therefore *desire* it. God, as the fulness of being, loves Himself as the most valuable being, but His love is identical with His Being. So, when we say that God loves Himself, we do not mean that God is moving towards Himself or that He desires Himself: it is the overwhelming mystery of the *bonum diffusivum sui* (cf. [ch. 19, e](#); [24, c](#)).

On the other hand, created being is motivated by its end, which is the first of the causes (cf. [ch. 18, f](#)), and sets all other causes in motion. In this sense, the good is described by its effect: the final cause, which is “what all beings desire” (Aristotle). This good, then, which motivates as final cause, is classified by St. Thomas into three kinds:

(i) Honorable good (*bonum honestum*): the good desired for its own sake.

(ii) Useful good (*bonum utile*): the good desired for the sake of something else.

(iii) Enjoyable good (*bonum delectabile*): the good desired for the enjoyment that it gives.

The root of enjoyment is the possession of the good. And if the possession of the good gives joy, the absence of it, which is evil, gives the opposite, which is grief or sorrow. However, joy and sorrow may subsist in the same subject or person *in the intermediate steps* towards the last end or ultimate good, due to the possibility of disorder and the struggle against obstacles.

d. Evil as privation

Evil, as St. Thomas says following the classical definition, is

“the privation of a good which is due”. A thing is good by what it is: if it has failed to be what it should be, to that extent it is bad. Evil as such is purely negative. That is why we say that it has no “formal” cause, because its “form” would be the privation or absence of good.

The “material” cause of evil, on the other hand, is the bearer of the privation, namely a being, an actual being, which as such is good, but it happens to be the material cause of something evil. No being, therefore, can be *thoroughly* evil, and there are degrees of evil, just as there are degrees of good.

There are beings that know and love (knowledge and appetite): angels, men, animals. In these beings, the attainment of the good is accompanied by enjoyment, by the satisfaction of the desire, with the emotion of pleasure, delight, enjoyment, happiness, *in an ascending order of refinement* depending on the perfection of the good attained. However, the good is not the same thing as the enjoyment: enjoyment is the *consequence* of the good, not the good itself. Likewise, sorrow is not evil itself, but the consequence of evil, since evil is the privation of a good which is *due*.

e. Evil as deordination

Now, when is a good “due”? This can be gleaned from the *end* of the thing. Let us take an example: is the end of a dog to know and love God? Obviously not: So then, is it bad for the dog not to know and love God? No, because it is not something due (but it *is* bad for the rational creature, whose end is precisely to know and love God).

Therefore, evil in the strict sense consists in *not attaining the end*: whatever hinders the movement towards the end is evil (whatever takes a man away from God is evil). In other words, evil is a *deordination* or displacement from the direction to the end.

f. Evil and freedom

Can “deordination” take place in every being? Can it occur in any being at all or only in certain beings? To answer these questions, we shall ask another question: What kind of being has the power to deordinate *itself*? Only that which has the power *to direct itself to the end*, i.e. the being endowed with freedom: evil in the strict sense can appear only when there is freedom.

As we said in [ch. 30, e](#), in Heaven freedom reaches its perfection: there is no possible deordination there. Once the final Judgment has taken place, the fulness of good is attained (if the

Judgment is favorable); but before that, there is a possibility of deordination.

g. Evil as such can neither move nor motivate

Since evil *as such* is nothing, neither is it *active* in the strict sense: an “evil” action is a *defective* action, i.e. an action lacking something due. This kind of action, in so far as it is, is good, but it is not as it should be. Evil as such, therefore, cannot be an *efficient* cause or move anything.

Nor can it motivate anybody: it can never be a *final* cause (see [ch. 29, a](#)). On the contrary, as such it repels: it arouses hatred to the extent that it hinders from reaching the good.

Therefore, no agent acts in order to produce evil for the sake of the evil itself. If he acts, it is for the sake of something good *which is not due*. For example, if someone wants to steal something, what motivates him is not the evil of the action or its injustice, because at that particular moment it appears as good to him that he should have that thing which is good: to have something is good, but to have it when it should not be there, is what makes the action *defective* and thereby evil.

h. Physical evil

Defective things in the universe, things that seem to fail or go wrong, are sometimes called “evil”, although this is not quite correct, since they follow the order designed by God for *corruptible* beings (cf. [ch. 22, d](#)). “Corruptible” means that they can be destroyed or changed into other things. It is within the divine plan that these corruptible things should fail in their being, since after all their *composition* leads to it.

Nevertheless, those failures (crop failures, for instance) are indeed deficiencies, and can therefore appear as evil: they do so *when considered out of context* with regard to the entire order of the universe.

Only God has the overall view of the universe. Since man does not have this power, these things may appear bad to him, especially if they harm him in some way. Besides, some of those deficiencies we attribute to nature are sometimes the result of defective actions of men, like floods caused by badly constructed dams.

Some of those “physical evils” are more intimately related to man, like sickness or death (cf. [ch. 19, g](#)), and thereby more related to *moral evil*. We know about this relationship, however, only *by divine*

revelation (the “redeeming” value of suffering): it is not discoverable by mere philosophy. Philosophers outside Christianity have always been puzzled by this mystery.

i. It is impossible for God to be the cause of evil

Since God is goodness itself (cf. [ch. 23, d](#)), it is impossible for Him to cause evil: it would be like a square circle. We should, however, clarify the following:

As was explained in [ch. 30, g](#), God is the “first” or primary cause of everything that exists, and therefore of “physical evil”. “Second” causes are at work everywhere, but God is the “first” cause always. Besides, “physical evils” may sometimes be a punishment for sin (although we are not in a position to pinpoint them), in which case they are actually good, being according to justice.

On the other hand, “moral evil” or sin can never be the effect of God, since in itself it is not something positive, and therefore does not need a “first cause” (“first cause” is by definition the cause of the *being* of things). The “evil act” is not a being in itself and by itself, and in that sense it has no “first cause”. However, in so far as the sin is an action with an entity of its own (albeit “accidental”), it *is* caused by God, i.e. in its positive being, but taking into account that it has a *deficiency* which does not come from God but from the “second cause” (the creature), and which precisely constitutes the sin as such.

Lastly, there is something which, again, with mere philosophy we can only glimpse, but with divine revelation becomes very clear: the fact that God *permits* evil through His providence in order to draw good out of it, and to repair the disorder caused by the creature (cf. Rom. 8:28, *omnia in bonum*).

CHAPTER 38

Moral Law and Conscience

a. *Eternal law and moral law*

“Law” means direction to the end, being *bound to the end* (*lex* in Latin = bond). When a being acts according to its nature by tending to its own end, it is fulfilling a *law*. Now, since God is the Creator of every being (cf. [ch. 24, e](#)) and the End of every being (cf. [ch. 23, d](#)), He has designed *all the laws* of the universe in His own infinite mind. In this sense, the “eternal law” is the *design of divine Wisdom whereby each being has an end and tends to it*.

Specifically, the law which directs human behavior in human acts is called “moral law”, and in so far as man recognizes it with his own reason it is called “natural law”. St. Thomas defines “natural law” as *the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature*.

The moral law flows from the Wisdom and Will of God as *Provident*, because “providence” means the supply of what is required to reach the end (cf. [ch. 24, g](#)):

(i) We say that it comes from the Wisdom of God, because it is in accordance with reason.

(ii) It comes from the Will of God, because God governs each being in accordance with its own nature, and so free beings are governed by laws which demand fulfillment and obedience voluntarily given.

(iii) It comes from God as *Provident*, because it is ordained to the common good, and it is laid down by the Ruler of the entire universe who takes care of it.

Hence, the complete definition of law, given by St. Thomas. It is a classical definition: *rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune ab eo qui curam communitatis habet promulgata*, a rational ordering to the common good made by him who has the care of the community and promulgated (*Summa theologiae*, I-II, 90, 4).

b. *Characteristics of the natural law*

Divine law governs creatures and is present in them by participation: they show it by their inclination to their own end and activity. Non-free creatures are ruled by “physical” laws, without

knowing them. But spiritual creatures participate *in the very Providence of God* by their knowing and free activity: they govern themselves and govern others. This is the metaphysical basis for the *principle of subsidiarity* (cf. [ch. 33, f](#)), an important principle in social philosophy, which states that *what can be done by a smaller body should not be done by a bigger one*, because men, on account of their knowledge and responsibility, are supposed to govern themselves and govern others: the bigger body should only *help* (in Latin: *subsidium*) if help is really needed and only to that extent.

Spiritual creatures participate in God's Providence through their knowledge, because they know or *recognize* the divine law, and direct themselves freely to their end. So, the natural law is a "participation of the eternal law in the rational creature", as St. Thomas says, and it is to be found in the "heart" of man, as St. Paul says (Rom. 2:15), i.e. by the natural light of reason, which shows man the difference between good and evil. A sign of it is the good inclinations that exist in every man, spontaneously recognized as good as distinct from the bad ones.

Thus, the natural law, by commanding and inclining to good acts, is a help to human freedom (cf. [ch. 30, f](#)). Man follows the natural law freely, not out of fear but because he wants the good. He can disobey it, and thus act against nature and commit sin, thus depriving himself of the good and of his freedom.

The very root of the natural law is the ordination to God: the fact that it is *obligatory* derives from the fact that God has given it. The essence of *morality* is not the dignity of the human person, or his discovery of value and duties, but his ordination to God. The binding character of the natural law is not the result of an "imperative of practical reason", or of the "sense of duty", or of "social imposition": it is God Himself, Creator and Provident, who ordains all things to His glory and gives men a rational command "written in their hearts".

Therefore, the way to *know* the natural law is not by analyzing social facts (sociological approach) or human urges and drives (psychological approach), because these facts and urges are not always *right*, i.e. directed to the right end. The road leading to the natural law is *metaphysical*: through the knowledge of being and the fullness of being (God). Ethics can only be rooted in metaphysics (cf. [ch. 34, c](#)).

The natural law is *universal*, i.e. valid for all men of all times and cultures, because it is based on *human nature*. And for the same reason, it is *unchangeable*, although it is possible to advance or regress in the knowledge of some of its precepts through a change of circumstances. It is, however, true that it is sometimes difficult to know clearly, due to human limitation, and that is why God has made an explicit revelation of the natural law, which is called *divine-positive*

law, so that men may know the natural law better, taking into account their fallen nature.

c. Knowledge of the natural law

The moral law can be naturally known by all men. The starting point in order to work it out is the awareness of the *first principle of practical reason*. “Practical” reason is the reason of man applied to human *activity*, while “speculative” reason is applied to human *knowledge*. The first principle of speculative reason is that “being cannot be non-being” (self-evident principle of non-contradiction). And what is the first principle that we follow in acting, i.e. the first principle of practical reason? That *good should be done and evil avoided*, which is equally self-evident, since the “good” is the first concept we form in order *to act*.

From this principle, every man with the use of reason can and should know God as his supreme good or last end (cf. [ch. 36, b](#)), and then he can reach the *two fundamental precepts* of the moral law: love of God above all things, and of neighbor as oneself (cf. [ch. 37, b](#)). This knowledge can be “natural”, but also “supernatural”, because the moral law has been *revealed* by God and *positively* promulgated in the Ten Commandments (Exodus, 20), in order to confirm the natural law, as we just said.

Every man with the right disposition (cf. [ch. 34, d](#)) can know the basic precepts of the moral law, because there is a natural inclination of the intellect and of the will leading to, them (tendency to the truth and the good). In the final analysis, every man can know the natural law if he really wants to.

d. Content of the natural law

The substance of it is the Ten Commandments. As we have seen, the first precept of the moral law is “to love God above all things”, i.e. to acknowledge His Lordship and Bounty, and thus to adore Him, to thank Him for the gift of existence, to offer reparation to Him, and to ask Him to supply our needs. This is the *worship* of God, and it covers the first three Commandments. Implicit in this first precept of the natural law is the obligation to accept and live the *true faith*, once it is known through Revelation.

The second precept of the moral law is “to love neighbor as oneself”. This applies first to those whom we owe most, namely parents and other authorities (fourth Commandment); and then to

everybody else, to the extent of at least *not doing them harm*: with deeds in their own person (fifth Commandment); in their spouse (sixth Commandment, which forbids acts contrary to the right generation and transmission of

human life: “adultery” originally means “impurity”); in their properties (seventh Commandment); with words (eighth Commandment); with thoughts or desires (ninth and tenth Commandments).

From these precepts, it follows that the moral law commands man also to make a right use of material goods, as regards both their use itself and the emotional attachment to them: they must be used and regarded as essentially related to the love of God and of our neighbor (this is the fundamental principle of social justice in the economic field).

e. Moral sanction

“Sanction” is understood as a property of law whereby the acts in accordance with it are *rewarded*, and the acts against it are punished with *penalties*.

What is the final reward for those who have attached themselves to the last end? Final and eternal possession of happiness without limits (cf. [ch. 36, d](#)).

As for penalty, it is sometimes thought that it is a suffering imposed on someone in payment for his misdeeds, but this is only accidental to it: its real essence is the deprivation of a good which was supposed to be possessed, and the consequent frustration of the will. Those who have separated themselves from God forever suffer the final penalty of a definitive exclusion from God: this is called the “pain of loss”, which also includes the “pain of punishment”, i.e. the exclusion from created goods.

Why does God impose a penalty? First, as a matter of justice: to restore the disorder caused by sin; and then as a deterrent for man to abstain from evil.

In this life too, in accordance with Providence God punishes the wicked and rewards the good. As we have seen, the calamities and trials of this life, evil as they are, can have a good effect, and that is why they are not absolutely evil (as sin is). On the other hand, many of the good things that happen to the wicked (except virtue) are in fact evil for them as they take them farther away from God.

In other words, in earthly rewards and punishments there is more than meets the eye. Some bad people seem to be successful, while some good people receive many trials; but many of the so-called

bad things are in fact good, and vice versa. Thus, while being successful in business is good in principle, for a particular person it may be bad if instead of making him better it makes him more greedy and takes him away from God. On the other hand, if a good person who suffers many trials knows how to take them well, by practicing the virtues of patience, humility, charity, justice, etc., like Job in the Bible, those trials will no doubt make him better.

The trials of this life are a sign of original sin: we perceive that something must have gone wrong. The apparent lack of reward in this life is due to the fact that men appreciate temporal good more than the only real good, due to a lack of supernatural perspective.

f. Conscience

As we have seen, man can know the moral law through the use of natural reason alone. Thus he participates in the eternal law “natural law” is a “participation of the eternal law in the rational creature”. “Eternal law” is the tendency of all things to their end: the design is in the mind of God, and it is fulfilled in creatures when they tend to their end. In that way, they participate in the eternal law: by just fulfilling it. But the “rational creature” participates in the eternal law both by knowing it with his intelligence and by directing himself to it freely: that “knowledge” in human reason is called the natural law.

The five *intellectual* habits or virtues are (cf. [ch. 34, d](#)):

(i) *Habit of first principles. **Speculative** – principle of non-contradiction. **Practical** – do good and avoid evil (synteresis)*

(ii) *Science – knowledge of things through necessary causes (speculative)*

(iii) *Wisdom – knowledge of things through ultimate causes (speculative)*

(iv) *Prudence – reason applied to moral activity: agree (practical)*

(v) *Art – reason applied to making: *facere* (practical)*

Agere signifies moral activity: reason applied to moral activity is called prudence. Reason applied to *facere* (making) is called art or technique. Speculative knowledge is called “theory” or theoretical knowledge, while reason applied to art or technique is called “praxis” or practical knowledge. Obviously, there can be no action without knowledge, no “practice” without “theory” (see [ch. 6, c](#); [8, d](#)). Let us now apply this to *law* and *conscience*.

The basis to discover the law is *synteresis*: through the

principle “do good and avoid evil”, ethical *science* is acquired. And to the extent that ethics is rooted in metaphysics (cf. [ch. 34, c](#)), and metaphysics is *wisdom* (cf. [ch. 6, b](#)), ethics is also wisdom. Now, when man, through *prudence* linking up with *science* in his intelligence, passes a *judgment* on this or that particular human act, this judgment is called the *judgment of conscience*. Thus, conscience is not a matter of feeling, but a *judgment by the intelligence bearing on an individual human act and in the light of the principles and precepts of the moral law*. It is a descent of the mind from the universal law to the particular case. The following comparison with human positive law and medicine is useful:

Human positive law		
Verdict of conscience		
Legislation		

This is necessary because the universal as such (science) has to be individualized (art or prudence), and for this a mind is required which is both speculative and practical. That is why a judge is required in human positive law: the verdict cannot be dispensed just mechanically, since every situation is unique, with its own set of circumstances. Likewise, medicine is both a science and an art: how does one apply the medical science to the patient? Through a doctor, who knows both the science and the patient with all his circumstances. Prudence can be compared to the judge, and art to the doctor, but both have to pass a judgment on the individual case. This is also what the judgment of conscience does in the moral case.

Therefore, while the law is the ultimate and objective rule of morality, conscience is the *proximate and subjective* rule of morality. By conscience we become conscious (*cum-scientia* = accompanying knowledge) of the morality of our own acts, whether past, present or future, i.e. we know them as good or bad (see [ch. 28, e](#)). It is a judgment of the intelligence moved by the will: if the latter is bad, i.e. not oriented towards the real good, it will corrupt the conscience.

Conscience is not, therefore, *autonomous*, i.e. a law unto itself, because the law is precisely the *objective rule* or standard which conscience is guided by: the very essence of conscience is to be subject to the law. Without law as point of reference, conscience is blind, and the only thing left is feeling or emotion. Every man, then, has a conscience to the extent that he has knowledge of the natural law (cf. c).

g. Principles guiding conscience

For the exercise of the prudential judgment of conscience, i.e. the application of the law (universal) to the individual human act (particular) taking into account the actual circumstances, the following principles can be stated:

(i) Only the *true* and *certain* conscience is the right proximate rule of morality. If the conscience is erroneous and one realizes it, or one suspects that it is erroneous, one cannot follow it.

(ii) Man has the obligation, therefore, to make sure that his conscience is “true”, i.e. sufficiently formed and informed, *educated*, in agreement with reality. The means to achieve this are: religious and moral formation, the seeking of advice, prayerful meditation, upright intention, habitual examination of conscience, sincerity, humility.

(iii) Man has the obligation to follow not only his true conscience, but also his erroneous conscience if it is *invincibly* erroneous, i.e. if it is practically impossible for him to avoid the erroneous judgment: not of course if there is the slightest

doubt or suspicion about it, in which case one cannot act until the truth has been clearly established, both about the law and about the facts.

(iv) It is not right to follow a culpably erroneous conscience or a doubtful conscience, if the doubt is based on serious reasons.

(v) Doubts can be resolved by means of sincerity, upright intention, the desire to seek the Will of God in everything, and a sense of responsibility in consulting the right person, choosing what is safer, etc.

CHAPTER 36

The Last End

a. Existence of a last end

Every man acts for an end (cf. [ch. 18, f](#)). If we see someone acting at random, we gather that he is not acting rationally, i.e. like a human being. That is why in order to *educate* a man, one has to appeal to his intelligence by showing him *what things are for*: to treat people as intelligent beings is to make them *notice* the end or purpose of things.

But does this apply to man alone? Can we not say that *everything* acts for an end, not just every man? Quite. Everything *has* an end: there is no action (whether performed by a machine, or by an animal, or by anything) without an end (cf. [ch. 18, g](#)).

Nevertheless, what is peculiar to the spiritual creature (not only man, but angels as well) is not just to act for an end, but *to direct himself to the end*, because (i) he knows it *as end*, and (ii) has the *ability* to guide himself. Human acts, as we said, are those which flow from the free will of man; but every act coming from an active potency is caused by it with a view to an end or object. Thus, all human acts are for the sake of their end.

St. Thomas also says that it is necessary for man to have an end, because in the subordination of ends to higher ends, it is impossible to go on ad infinitum, since if there is no first end in the intention (and last in the execution) nothing will be desired and nothing will move. (The philosophy of “praxis”, typical of Marxism, denies that there is any last end: for them, man is moved by “practical” needs. This is tantamount to denying also the real motivation for human activity. There *must* be a last end, since otherwise there is no end at all, and so no motivation.)

Moreover, the last end *can only be one*: it excludes any other “last end” by definition, by necessity. It would be like saying that this car is going to this city and that city at the same time. If there *are* several ends or motivations, what happens is that they *subordinate* themselves to one, which then is the last. All that man wants, he wants it, at least implicitly, for the sake of a *last* end. Men do not differ, then, in envisioning a last end for everything they do; but they may differ in the way they identify that last end.

b. Identification of the last end

As we have seen in [ch. 23, d](#) and [e](#), God is the *natural* last end of man, because He is the fulness of the act of being, the essential goodness.

Only God is “first” cause, i.e. the cause that produces the being of things, and it is not fitting for the “first” cause to act in order to acquire something. Therefore, when God acts, it is not in order to acquire something, but only in order to communicate His perfection. It is only proper to Him to be the last end.

Only God is the supreme goodness, because He is the supreme *esse*. Since goodness acts as a *final* cause, God is the last end of every participated good: this is how participated beings seek the fulness of being. Only God is an end to Himself, because He is His own goodness. But all other beings have their end outside themselves, because they are participated, and so need to be completed. No created being can be the last end for itself, nor for any other being. Human love, for example, terminating as it does in a human person, cannot be the *last* end of man.

Let us recall also that the object of the human will is “the good” as understood by the intellect. But how does the intellect understand “the good”? The intelligence forms concepts which are universal. So, when it looks at goodness, it presents “universal” goodness to the will. Consequently, the will desires the *fulness* of goodness, of *real* goodness. But this *total* goodness cannot be found in anything created, but only in God.

Therefore, the last end of man cannot consist in anything created, not even in the entire creation, because neither a portion of creation nor the whole of it is the totality of goodness. This explains the perpetual dissatisfaction of man in this life until he finds God. As we mentioned, every man desires happiness necessarily. Happiness, however, is not as such the last end (see [ch. 35, d](#)), but only the consequence of loving God, who is the real last end. If one loves God “because He can make him happy”, the last end is no longer God but oneself, and happiness is not thereby found.

This is why, the first commandment of the “natural law”, as well as of the divine-positive law (Bible), is to love God above all things and more than oneself. Only if this order to the end is kept is self-love right: the way to love ourselves is by directing ourselves to our real last end, which is God. Not to do so is to destroy ourselves.

Each creature tends to God as last end, but according to its own manner of being. Man does it by intellectual knowledge and wilful love. The non-spiritual creatures reach their last end to the extent that they are *similar* to God by participating in being; by reflecting God's

perfection in themselves, they give glory to Him, they imitate Him. But the spiritual creatures reach God by their own operations, because the intellect and will can have God as object (intelligence as Truth, and will as Good). Because of their freedom, they determine themselves to the end, while the other creatures are *brought* to the end.

c. Natural last end and supernatural last end

This natural ordination has been raised to the order of supernatural grace whereby man is ordained to God supernaturally. By his “natural” ordination to God, man should love God as his last end to the extent that he is capable of knowing and loving Him through his “natural” powers. This “natural” last end is like a standard to measure the goodness of human acts by showing their proportion or disproportion to that end. *It is not correct to consider the direct ordination of man to God as peculiar to the supernatural order only* (cf. [ch. 17, c](#)). Human life and all its dimensions (temporal, individual and social) is intrinsically ordained to God. What happens is that man has been taken up and raised by the supernatural ordination. The union with God required by the natural last end can only reach as far as the natural power of the creature permits, but it does not reach up to the *participation in the intimate life of God* (beatific vision), because this transcends *all* the capacity of the creature, and constitutes precisely the supernatural last end.

By this elevation to the supernatural order, what is only “natural” does not disappear. On the contrary, it is taken up, healed, enhanced, and raised. What the supernatural end does is to gather in itself the fulness of the natural end, taking it to an infinitely higher order, i.e. to the participation in the very life of the Blessed Trinity.

By virtue of the “natural” ordination of man to God, there is in every man a *natural desire to see God*. This is not, however, a desire “for the beatific vision”, because if that were so, the supernatural order would not be, as it is, *gratuitous*, i.e. freely given by God: it would be *due* to human nature. So, the desire for the beatific vision arises only after receiving the faith. The “natural” desire to see Him aims at seeing Him as He can be seen by a creature without any supernatural ordination as such, and would be satisfied simply with a “natural” knowledge of God.

Not even in the beatific vision is there a desire to *comprehend* God, because this is impossible for the creature (cf. [ch. 23, f, in fine](#)). The beatific vision is the intimate participation of the creature in the life of the Blessed Trinity, but not in the complete comprehension of God.

The natural order, then, does not have the power to lead to the

supernatural order, but it has an *obediential potency*, i.e. a capacity to be elevated by grace, specifically in the spiritual creature (animals do not have this “obediential potency”) (see [ch. 25, e](#)).

d. Possession of the last end: happiness

Happiness, as St. Thomas says, is called the supreme good of man, because it is the attainment or enjoyment of the supreme good, which is God. This attainment of man's last end occurs through an operation which must be distinctly human, i.e. spiritual, through knowledge and love.

While the happiness of God is His own being, the happiness of man is attained through the operation of knowing and loving God, which unites him to God and thus gives glory to his Creator. For it to be a perfect blessedness which satisfies, all man's yearnings, it must be (i) interminable and (ii) stable.

Happiness, therefore, is *the stable and interminable possession of the supreme good which satisfies man's desire totally*. Can this happiness be attained in this life? It can be attained, but only imperfectly: we can know and love God in this life, and in so far as this knowledge and love penetrates our human acts and our life, we are all the more happy.

What is the content of this supernatural bliss? We speak of it as beatific “vision”. This vision corresponds therefore primarily to the intelligence, but the appetite and enjoyment which follow every act of knowledge (cf. [ch. 29, a](#)) correspond to the will. So, it is neither the intelligence alone nor the will alone that enjoy the beatific vision, but the whole person knowing and loving God and thereby being happy to the utmost: this eternal and boundless happiness is the accompaniment of the beatific vision.

As we have said, man's natural powers are not sufficient in order to attain the beatific vision, but as an intellectual creature man has the “obediential potency” of being raised to the supernatural order by grace (cf. [ch. 21, a](#)).

CHAPTER 5

Disposition of the Christian Toward Philosophy

a. God and the natural truths of religion

How should a Christian feel in relation to philosophy?

We have seen how philosophy is needed by theology. We have also seen that God, in His revelation, included as part of that revelation the *natural* truths concerning Himself and man. Now, if these natural truths can be attained by man himself, why then did God *reveal* them? St. Thomas explains this very well. He says that although these truths can *theoretically* be discovered by man, in practice however it is extremely difficult, since very few people would have the capacity, the patience, the leisure, the perseverance to reach all those truths by themselves, and, if they did, it would be again practically impossible to avoid errors mixed with the truth. Therefore, in order to *facilitate* man in learning the truths that are vital for him to know regarding God and himself, God was good enough to reveal these truths clearly, so that everybody would know them firmly, easily and without error.

Pre-Christian philosophers did fall into error in many essential points which are necessary for man to know well so as to direct himself to his true destination, which is the true God. Post-Christian philosophers, i.e. those who have separated themselves from the Christian faith, have oftentimes fallen into errors which are even greater, since the corruption of the best is the worst (*corruptio optimi pessima*). This sin of apostasy (rejection of the Christian faith once it has been received) has destructive consequences for the natural powers of man, such as the intelligence and the will. Pre-Christian philosophers, on the other hand, are free from the sin of apostasy, but whether the philosophy is pre-Christian or post-Christian, it shows reason's vital need for faith.

b. Philosophy and the truths of the natural order

Philosophy deals with truths which can be known by natural reason. The Christian knows some natural truths through his faith. This knowledge that he has by faith is superior in nature, higher than the knowledge he can acquire through philosophy, because the source of faith is more trustworthy than the source of rational knowledge (God is the former; human reason is the latter).

This knowledge that the Christian has, of *natural* truths, by faith, is first of all a *negative norm*: these truths tell man what he should not accept. But it is also a *positive norm*, as it helps reason to know those natural truths. For example, I have the knowledge (I know) *by faith* that God exists. But I can also reach that conclusion (that God exists) with my reason alone. When I do so, when I take my reason and go through the steps that prove that God exists, I am still capable of understanding that truth *in the light of my faith* much better than if I just use reason alone; I can appreciate it much more; I can see its ultimate meaning much better. My faith not only defends me against errors, but helps me to understand better with my reason.

Therefore, when philosophizing, when using our reason, we should never, under any circumstances, suspend our judgment about our faith or ignore the knowledge we have through it. To willfully doubt any part of our faith is a grave sin. We cannot doubt, suspend our judgment, or ignore our faith. I have this knowledge in my mind, the knowledge of my faith, *on the highest possible authority*, so I have no right to doubt it. That would be either apostasy or a most unnatural split of the mind, a lack of unity of life.

The believer, when reasoning, cannot forget his faith. In fact, his faith will be his guide, because it is a knowledge which is beyond doubt, while the knowledge acquired through reason alone is often subject to doubt. This help from the faith is very good for the human mind, because it prevents it from falling into the presumption of giving too much credence to itself — to what the mind can find out by itself —, which is shown sometimes by the attitude of making a “problem” out of everything. In the light of our faith there are no problems: everything is clear. This is not presumption, but trust in what God has revealed. We all like to learn by ourselves, but if we accept something from a higher source we avoid the danger of presumption, of trusting in ourselves. Besides, what faith does is to heal the human intelligence: it cures reason from its weaknesses.

Therefore, in order to receive the faith, one needs the right disposition of humility. Faith is a gift from God which God is ready to give to everyone, as long as He finds humility. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”, say both St. James (Js. 4:6) and St. Peter (1 Pet. 5:5) quoting the Book of Proverbs (3:34). Now, since the faith is related to the use of our reason, and therefore to philosophy, for the exercise of reason we also need a disposition of humility and uprightness of mind and will.

c. Christian Philosophy as a common cultural heritage

Christian philosophy has also the value of constituting a common cultural heritage. It has the role of unifying Christians, because when we share our common heritage we are more united. This is another reason why it is very good to learn Christian philosophy and wisdom. The attitude of contempt for the past is barbarism. We ought to appreciate the treasure we have inherited from the past: our common cultural heritage.

The unity of life whereby we are not split into isolated compartments (in every Christian, grace comes to perfect human nature) requires that philosophy should serve to strengthen the faith. There should be no dissociation in the Christian between philosophy and faith, between life and religion.

In fact, since the *catechism* is like the distillation of the faith (the simple exposition of the fundamental truths of the faith so that it can reach all minds), and philosophy forms part of theology, philosophy has also found its way into the catechism. There are many metaphysical concepts which are reached by everybody through the catechism, such as “person” and “nature”, “substance” and “accident”, “matter” and “form”. That is why it is also very important not to make abrupt changes in theological or catechetical terminology, because the meaning of those terms is precise. It has taken the Church a long time to find the right expressions. A change of terms can easily lead to a change of *concepts*, and thereby to possible errors or confusion.

d. The help of faith not against the use of the intelligence

However, the help that the faith gives to reason is not a labor-saving device. It does not spare the believer his effort to think and to reason. Faith does not substitute itself for reason. It enlightens and empowers reason, but then reason has to move by itself. God does not treat us as puppets, but as intelligent and free beings.

And how does reason function? *In contact with reality.* The light of reason is reality, not dreams or feelings, and faith does not contradict reality at all. It enlightens man so that he can see better, but then he has to *see*, to open his eyes.

Thus, faith does not suppress the natural activity of the intelligence nor the effort of reason to reach the higher truths. The Christian judges philosophical doctrines in the light of his faith. And then, with philosophy, not with the faith, he can point out the roots of errors in those doctrines: the error is refuted not by saying that it is contrary to the faith, but by exposing it philosophically, i.e. with arguments from reason.

Lastly, what are the rulings of the teaching authority of the

Church regarding philosophy?

(i) A continuous insistence on *subordinating* reason to faith, philosophy to theology, *without suppressing* reason, without suppressing philosophy.

(ii) Continuous recommendations to study and to teach the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, on account of the extraordinary harmony of faith and reason accomplished by him. These recommendations of the Church are not mere advice, since they have become part of Canon Law and ratified by the II Vatican Council. So, by law Christians are supposed to study and to teach the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas, taking him as their guide.

PART VII

History of Philosophy

CHAPTER 44

Introduction to the History of Philosophy

a. Philosophy as instrument of theology

The last section of this book on Christian Philosophy is a brief reflection on the relevance of the history of philosophy for theology.

Let us recall that reason is to faith what philosophy is to theology (cf. [ch. 2, c](#)): the believer looks at reality in the light of his faith, but in so doing he uses his reason. It is therefore of interest to the theologian to know what reason can know without the light of faith by studying the history of philosophy, both (i) outside the faith, and (ii) in opposition to the faith: in the latter case, to realize how easily reason goes astray when it withdraws from the guidance of the light of the faith; and in the former case, to realize how indeed the faith has come to *perfect* the best achievements of reason.

For a Christian the standard to evaluate a “philosophy” is the *truth* (= agreement of the mind with reality), as above all cultural and subjective differences, and as guaranteed by the teaching authority (*magisterium*) of the Church (cf. [ch. 2, b](#)), which makes our conviction more firm than any natural certainty, since we trust God then, rather than man (cf. [ch. 28, c](#)).

It is not a matter of seeing only the errors, or only the truth, or of developing a childish admiration for the philosophers. The primary interest of a Christian in the history of ideas must be their relevance to the Christian faith. When he reads philosophy, he should not take an emotional approach which might lead him to compromise with error out of personal sympathy with the philosopher: he must always hold on to the truth and to whatever helps in the *salvation of souls*.

If a “philosophy” has done harm to the faith, it is not a matter of hating or condemning the philosopher, since only God can judge the persons, but one has to look at the objectivity of the data. One might be inclined to accept, or compromise with some “philosophy” incompatible with the faith, by suggesting some alterations here and there to “make” it compatible; but this is a high risk to take. Rather, if that “philosophy” did actually do harm to the faith, the adverse judgment (*not* of the person, but of the ideas) should be all the more severe.

On the other hand, whatever *truth* there is in any “philosophy” is useful to theology, and therefore acceptable: this is how St. Thomas handled the Greek philosophers and the Moslem and Jewish

theologians, from whom he accepted a great deal (cf. [ch. 4, b](#)).

However, the case of “modern” philosophers is different. St. Thomas was able to take that liberal approach with non-christian philosophers, because they were really *pre-christian*, while “modern” philosophy as a whole (cf. [ch. 4, c](#)) has rejected Christianity, even though individual philosophers have remained Christian in an admirable though doubtful effort of assimilation. It would therefore be rash oversimplification to claim that just as St. Thomas “baptized” Aristotle, we should now “baptize” modern philosophers: some of them would in fact “turn in their grave” were we to attempt such a thing, as they are not just non-christian, but post-christian or even anti-christian.

Modern philosophy is inextricably bound up with Christianity, to the extent that it simply cannot be understood without it: all that it affirms and all that it denies is part of the Christian heritage, either because it preserves it or because it rejects it; hence the need to study it.

b. Overview of the History of Philosophy

We can divide the History of Western Philosophy into three periods (cf. [ch. 4](#)):

First: Pre-christian philosophy — from about the 7th century B.C. into the Christian era.

Second: Christian philosophy — up to the 15th century Renaissance: transition into

Third: Modern philosophy, with the following *cultural* stages:

Renaissance — shift of interest from God to man

Protestant Revolt — 16th century

Rationalism — 17th-18th centuries

Romanticism — 19th century to our time

Let us now briefly point out the characteristics of each of these periods.

First, pre-christian philosophy extends well into the Christian era: a philosopher like Plotinus, for instance, is considered pre-christian, even though he lived in the 3rd century A.D., because he was never a Christian. Or take Averroes, for example: he was an Arab who lived in the 12th century after Christ, but he can also be considered a pre-christian philosopher, because he never had any real

contact with Christianity, as he lived in a different cultural area ("culture" has to be taken into account in assessing philosophy).

Pre-christian philosophy, then, includes the classical philosophy of Greece and Rome which flourished from the 7th century B.C. to about the 5th century after Christ. Did these philosophers receive any influence from Christianity? Not up to the time of Christ, of course, but they did receive some influences from the Old Testament through the Jews, especially towards the end of this period. There is one particular philosopher who was a contemporary of Christ: he was Jewish and lived in Alexandria, Egypt. His name was *Philo of Alexandria*, and he was the first philosopher to attempt a synthesis of Platonism and the Bible, i.e. the Jewish Old Testament.

The endeavors of these pre-christian philosophers, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, are quite remarkable: they were just using their human reason, without any divine revelation to guide them. This sheer effort of reason is all the more remarkable, and worth studying, because it shows *how far reason can reach by itself alone*, as well as how many errors reason can fall into without the guidance of divine revelation.

The second period is that of the Christian centuries, showing the power of divine revelation to inspire men in their search for truth. The metaphysical achievements (i.e. in the doctrine on God and man) of these centuries are unsurpassed. The wisdom accumulated in those centuries is incalculable. The problem is the time it would take to read the works therein produced; but anyone who really gets acquainted with that wisdom comes to that conclusion. Since usually there is little time for this, what is essential is to know very well the catechism of Christian doctrine, which contains this wisdom in simple formulas.

Those who "believe" in man more than in God try to bury that Christian wisdom of the past, to rule it out as "out of date", not bothering to read it. Others, with blank minds, swallow this as the truth. So that in the end almost nobody reads the treasures of Christian wisdom: the Christians themselves, because they "don't have time"; the enemies of Christianity, because they don't want to hear; and those who are neither enemies nor friends just follow whatever the others say (cf. [ch. 1, c](#)).

Now, the third period: What happened in the 15th century? In every century many things happen, both good and bad. For one thing, the Church has always managed to produce saints in every age: there is a steady flow of them throughout the centuries, so that the Church always manages to save the day, to arrive on time with the appropriate men or women of God. But it is also true that every age has its share of calamities in every respect: Satan is never at rest.

The Renaissance meant first of all *a shift of interest from God*

to man (recall the movement of “humanism”). There were many factors: one of them was the economic development of Europe, which was the occasion for an increase of greed, of selfish interest in man, in how to make man happy, making happiness an end in itself (cf. [ch. 36, d](#)). This led to a tendency to regard God either as a stranger or an outright enemy to human happiness.

“Renaissance” means “revival”: what did they “revive”? They claimed to revive the classical culture of the Greeks: not, however, with the approach of St. Thomas, i.e. trying to learn how far the Greeks had advanced in their search for truth, but with what they called the *modern* approach. In fact, they invented this word “modern” (from the Latin *modo* = now). The *moderns* were those who rejected the immediate past as *a period of subservience of man to God*: to revive the classical past for them was to return to the time when man was still in the forefront, and the gods were seen as accessories to human happiness. Their interest in the revival of pagan culture was to a large extent a reaction against God.

It was then that *Martin Luther* (1483-1546) changed the concept of religious faith by making God definitely an accessory to human happiness. His question was: What good is God *to me*? It is *I* that is important, not God. And that is the essence of Protestantism: all external authorities are eliminated, and man is left alone before God, to *use* God for his own happiness: What use can I make of God? How happy can God make me *feel*? (cf. [ch. 4, c](#))

This was followed by rationalism, initiated by *Rene Descartes*, who lived in the first half of the 17th century. Rationalism is the reduction of everything to what is merely “natural”, i.e. within the scope of human reason, and the rejection of whatever is “supernatural”, i.e. *above* human nature and above human reason (cf. [ch. 4, c](#)).

And the latest cultural period is Romanticism, one of whose results has been the reduction of what is human to what is merely *material*, by putting “feelings” above reason. This has led to an out-and-out materialism in the 20th century: the reduction of man to *animal*.

Let us now take a closer look at those three periods, albeit in brief outline, since a detailed history of philosophy is not within our scope. (See [Bibliography](#).)

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The History of Christian Philosophy

a. *There is a Christian philosophy*

We have called “Christian philosophy” (cf. [ch. 3, c](#)) the philosophy which developed in the environment of the Christian faith and Christian theology. It *is* a philosophy, since it is *reasoning* regarding the highest causes, and first principles of reality, understandable to anyone, whether Christian or not. In fact it is a very powerful philosophy for anyone who really gets to know it: indeed, it shows that when “reason” is *guided* by Christian faith, it can walk more safely.

Some modern historians of philosophy have maintained that there was no such thing as a “Christian” philosophy, but only a Christian *theology*. When writing the history of philosophy, therefore, they start with the Greeks, by-pass the Christian centuries, and go on to the Renaissance, when “pure” philosophy begins again. But this unwarranted approach has already been surpassed by more recent historians, both Christian and non-Christian, who have taken the trouble of seriously studying the philosophy of the Christian centuries and thereby rediscovered its astonishing wealth and creative thought.

The philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas is particularly vigorous and profound, precisely as a philosophy. It is not a “mixture” of faith and reason: St. Thomas always *distinguishes* faith and reason *without confusing them*, but also shows their perfect *harmony*, i.e. how they can *never be in conflict*. What we can see with reason alone, is seen by faith with much more light, and what faith *reveals* is never against reason, though it often surpasses it (cf. [ch. 2](#), and [21, a](#) and [b](#)).

Christianity is not a “philosophy” but a religion: a supernatural religion revealed by God Himself, and thus claiming to be the true religion, for which it can show its credentials (motives of credibility). The body of doctrine revealed by God (Divine Revelation) includes (i) *supernatural* truths, i.e. truths which man could never discover by himself, and (ii) *natural* truths about God and man, e.g. that God exists, that He is only one, that He is the Creator of the Universe, that man has a spiritual and immortal soul, that there is a moral law.

These “natural” truths are also the object of philosophy: Aristotle, for instance, studied them. But by revealing them Himself, God wants to guide us, to clarify our minds, like a teacher explaining some difficult matter to a student and thus enlightening him (cf. [ch. 5, a](#)

and b).

Many of the truths which the pagans had known, were clarified by Christian revelation, so that they did not have to break away from their philosophy altogether, but rather bring it to perfection. This is what happened, for instance with *St. Justin*, who died as a Christian martyr in the middle of the 2nd century. His tradition was then followed by countless others, among whom the great Christian teachers St. Augustine and St. Thomas. The latter says that those “natural” truths about God and man can indeed be known by reason alone, but not easily: through divine revelation, on the other hand, they are known easily and without error.

b. The formation of Christian philosophy

In [ch. 4](#), we have already outlined the process of formation of that Christian philosophy, reaching its peak in the 13th century. As we said, some historians of philosophy have ignored all this period, dismissing it as just “theology”. By actually studying it, however, one can verify its superiority in real wisdom to any other period of history: the *philosophy* which grew up under that “theology” remains unsurpassed in depth and range. This is understandable when we consider the *motivation* of those theologians in their philosophizing: to know and understand God better, so as to love Him more, and thus live better as men. The loftiness of this motivation is what made their thought so profound and sublime.

On the other hand, as we also said in [ch. 4, c](#), subsequent philosophies have been motivated by *human* ambitions. Thus, for Descartes, the aim of philosophy must be to empower man to know the world so as to master it. “Knowledge is power”, said Francis Bacon. Man wants only his own happiness then, and God becomes an accessory to it (cf. [ch. 44, b](#)). Philosophy ceases to be a “handmaid to theology”, and becomes a “handmaid” to human ambition for power and pleasure: this is the *decadence* of philosophy after the Christian centuries. It becomes fragmented, one for each man, so to speak: philosophical “systems” become man-centered, *immanentistic*, i.e. beginning and remaining *in* man, without transcending him.

The Christian theologians, motivated as they were by the love of God, elaborated a highly enlightening philosophy with far-reaching insights clarifying all human problems, dispelling both the natural darkness of the limited human intelligence, and the *infra-natural* darkness brought about by the state of fallen nature (cf. [ch. 2, c](#)).

c. *The contents of Christian philosophy*

As we said, Christian philosophy accepted many elements from Greek philosophy, but this doesn't mean that Christian doctrine *adapted* itself to Greek philosophy. What it did was to use the concepts already in circulation and perfect them, as we explained: We mentioned also that the main source was Neo-Platonism, as for example the doctrine of Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher who attempted a theology of the Bible with the use of Greek concepts. Christians used a great deal of Neo-Platonism without absorbing its errors. The highest achievement in this respect is found in St. Augustine, who was born in the 4th century and died in the 5th.

After St. Augustine, there was a growing influence from Aristotle, which reached its peak with St. Thomas, who used Aristotle more thoroughly than any other Christian theologian, but adding to it the best of Plato and Neo-Platonism, as well as of Jewish and Arab philosophers. The achievement of St. Thomas is precisely to have synthesized the best of all that went before him. Thus, it will be enough for us to take a look at the doctrines of St. Augustine and of St. Thomas in order to get a fair idea of the contents of Christian philosophy.

d. *St. Augustine (354-430)*

The celebrated Bishop of Hippo explained the relations of faith and reason in great depth. It is not easy to know how *both* to distinguish them *and* to unite them, without either separating them or confusing them. St. Augustine did this very well. For him, reason is used by faith in order to develop what one believes. Therefore, reason should not be despised: in fact, faith needs it in order to develop itself.

In his philosophical formation before his conversion to the Christian faith, he came under the influence mainly of Neo-Platonism, specifically of Plotinus, whose deeply God-centered philosophy helped him to find his way to the faith. Augustine's quest was for *happiness*, and he finally found the answer in God. For him, "philosophy" is the road to God: "the true philosopher is one who loves. God" (*verus philosophus est amator Dei*). What is the meaning and purpose of the world around us? To lead us to God.

Only the Christian can be completely happy, because he possesses the supreme good, and *that* is philosophy: the means to reach that happiness is to possess the truth, which is found in its entirety only in Christianity. Reason by itself can discover all the natural truths about God and man, but with our faith we have the *best*

way to know them, That is why he says that if someone does not know God, it is his own fault: the reason for ignorance about God is to be found in the evil passions of man, and the will that goes astray.

He uses arguments from reason to prove that God exists, and that He is the “unchanging essence”. What the sun is for the universe, God is for us: our light and teacher. The things of the world, changeable as they are, show that they have been created by God “out of nothing”, because for St. Augustine, the fact that they are changeable indicates an element of nothingness, since for him “to be” is to be “always the same”. This is a very Platonic idea, which St. Thomas would correct, or rather improve, by calling God not an “unchanging essence” but the “subsistent to be itself” (*ipsum esse subsistens*).

St. Augustine also maintains that the “ideas” of all that exists are in God, and that God has somehow *sown* these ideas in the world of matter as the seeds of all things: this is a Stoic doctrine accepted by St. Augustine, which shows that he did not know Aristotle, i.e. the hylomorphic doctrine. It is characteristic of St. Augustine that his teaching is profound but incomplete, and this gives an idea of Christian philosophy in its process of formation.

As for man, he is also influenced by Platonic ideas: he cannot explain very well how the soul is united to the body, as he did not know the Aristotelian doctrine of the soul as substantial form of the body (see previous chapter). For him, following Plato, man is rather a soul using a body, although he did admit that the body is part of man. Likewise, he could not explain very well the nature of sense perception. Plato had said, as we saw, that sensible things do not really exist, but are only an “imitation” of the ideas (reality doesn't change; but sensible things change; therefore they are not real), and St. Augustine's tendency is to think in this way too. According to him, our sense knowledge is not to be put on the same level as our knowledge of ideas: there is a sharp division between the sensible and the intelligible worlds. St. Thomas would also correct this Platonic tendency: without confusion, there is union and continuity of senses and intelligence, as of body and soul (cf. [ch. 26, b](#); [27, f](#)).

All the above explains why some Christian philosophers who have followed St. Augustine more than St. Thomas have fallen into error and even heresy, not because there are errors or heresies in St. Augustine, but because his doctrine contains some unsettled or obscure points which, without the clarifications of St. Thomas, *could* lead to misunderstandings. This is why the Church insists that we should study St. Thomas above all. The other Christian teachers are also very good, but the Angelic Doctor is the “universal teacher” (*Doctor communis*): if we follow him, the Church guarantees that we

will not go astray. Armed with St. Thomas, so to speak, we can also study the other Christian teachers without the danger of misunderstanding them (see the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* mentioned in the Foreword and in [ch. 4, c](#)).

Regarding the topic of *evil*, St. Augustine is particularly profound. Before his conversion he had been under the influence of the Manichees, who believed that evil exists *by itself* as a substance, when in fact it can only exist as an accident, i.e. *in* something, as an absence of a good that is due, as a deficiency of being that *should* be there (cf. [ch. 19, g](#), and [35, d](#)). He came to this conclusion aided by St. Ambrose's remark that "evil is the privation of good". The only real evil for St. Augustine is sin, which is caused by the free will of rational beings (cf. [ch. 39, c](#)). The human will is good in itself, but it can turn to evil by turning away from the Last End and thus fall into disorder (cf. [ch. 35, e](#)). Man therefore needs *divine grace* to put his will right and to fulfill the law of God.

St. Augustine is perhaps above all renowned for his book *The City of God*, where he says that "love" made two "cities", since there are only two loves: the love of God reaching to the contempt of self, and the love of self reaching to the contempt of God. These two cities, the City of God and the Earthly City, subsist together until the end of time.

St. Augustine became the greatest doctrinal authority in the Church up to the time of St. Thomas. This is acknowledged by the latter, who lived eight centuries later: when he had to correct some points in St. Augustine's doctrine, he did it with extreme reverence and tact.

e. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

It is the Church herself that has declared (cf. [ch. 4, b](#) and [c](#)), in a continuous chain of rulings and utterances from the time of his canonization in 1323 up to the present, that if we take the trouble of studying St. Thomas well we will never go astray in our faith or in our philosophy.

In all the previous sections of this Course on Christian Philosophy, we have discussed all the major points of his philosophy, such as:

- (i) the concept of being (*ens*) as "holder of the actuality of being" (*esse*);
- (ii) the creative causality of God as *Ipsum Esse*;
- (iii) the world of creatures as *participated* beings, freely created

by God “out of nothing”;

(iv) man as the top creature of the material universe because of his intelligence and free will;

(v) the metaphysical foundation of morals as the ordination of the human will to man's Last End;

(vi) the Common Good as End of man and society.

Let us now summarize the spirit of his most important original contributions.

As was said in [ch. 16, b](#); [23, a](#), and [45, c](#) (cf. also [ch. 4, b](#)), his basic insight is. I AM WHO AM: God's self-denomination to Moses from behind the burning bush that was not consumed (Exodus, 3). This is the starting point in his mind: essential for us if we want to follow his mind as the Church says (*ad mentem S. Thomae...*). He had only one basic question in his mind from the time he was three years old and asked his governess precisely that: *Quid est Deus?* What is God? “God” was from then on what pervaded his mind and his entire existence. It was also around that time that his governess gave him a piece of paper with the Hail Mary written on it, and he was so delighted that he ate it!

When later on he found in the Bible the answer to his question, he got the illumination which would guide him in all his thinking ever since: God is TO-BE, and the rest is only a participation in being. While the *act of being* in God is *subsistent*, our act of being is participated, limited by our *manner of being*. And as we said, he took “participation” from Plato, and “actuality” from Aristotle, raising both to a much higher metaphysical plane under the illumination of his view of God through the Bible's divine revelation. So, here is the theologian illumined by his *faith*, raising the very best that *reason* can discover by itself to the higher plane of faith, and thus also helping faith to *understand* better.

St. Thomas conceived theology as a science whose first principles are received from faith, “the articles of the faith” (cf. [ch. 2, a](#)). Then, from those first principles, by means of metaphysics, it draws conclusions. In other words, theology *begins* with faith (principles = beginnings), and then it draws *conclusions* with the help of reason illumined and enlivened by faith. These conclusions are indeed *theological*, but we cannot thereby say that they are not “philosophical” as well.

St. Thomas is at his best when *distinguishing in order to unite*, when analyzing in order to synthesize. This is what he does with faith and reason, theology and philosophy, grace and nature, spirit and matter, intelligence and senses, supernatural virtues and human virtues, the eternal and the temporal, the Church and the State, etc.

etc. The source of human errors, at least the involuntary ones, is our tendency to either *confuse* or *separate*, a tendency carefully avoided by the luminous intelligence of the Angelic Doctor. His thought is remarkably free from the imbalances, fragmentations and dislocations so frequent in other thinkers: it is all wondrously unified and harmonized, bright and vigorous. His mind was both sharply analytical and creatively synthetic, avoiding both the analysis that misses the wood for the trees through shortsighted meticulousness, and the hasty generalization that fails to see the complexities of reality through haughty intellectual presumption. While when analyzing he dispels confusions, when he synthesizes he overcomes divisions.

It is important, however, to realize the true source of this powerful intelligence. It was not so much that he was born like that or that he was a genius, but rather that *he allowed the fullness of divine illumination through faith to penetrate him thoroughly*. Seeing God, then, as the fullness of being, *being* was therefore what loomed largest in his vision of reality (rather than *form*, as is the case with most other philosophers), and that which expanded and deepened his intelligence, which was further clarified by the purity and holiness of his personal life.

Man's pride inclines him to accept only *forms* in his thought, rather than *being*, because "forms" can be conceptualized, i.e. seized by the human mind, while "being" cannot be properly conceptualized in its actuality, as it is the *act* of all forms and the light of their intelligibility. Intellectual humility is therefore required to accept reality as it is, without trying to *adjust* it to our mind, but being always ready to *learn* from it, adjusting *our* minds to it.

f. Decadence after St. Thomas

The greatness of his achievement explains to some extent what happened after him (cf. [ch. 4, c](#)). The tendency to *formalism* asserted itself very strongly: a tendency to think of reality in terms of forms, and ignore the importance of the *act of being*. Even those who called themselves Thomists fell into this trap. Ideas, rather than reality, have a fascination for man. St. Thomas was the most *realistic* of all thinkers: *idealism* could not be farther from his mind. And this is why the Church recommends him so much, because the best preparation or disposition *to receive and nurture the faith* is a thorough "realism", i.e. a candid and straightforward adherence to things as perceived through the senses and understood through the intelligence.

The "formalism" that prevailed after St. Thomas brought about a decadence of creative thought, and paved the way for the

Renaissance and for modern philosophy. First, it led to a *nominalism* (Ockham) which considered concepts in the mind as mere “names” without any *real* content. The consequence was *scepticism* as to the power of the intellect to really know reality. And this led to *voluntarism*: the primacy of the will over the intellect, and therefore *of subjectivity over objectivity*.

Protestantism was the religious crisis of this intellectual decadence.

The History of Ancient Philosophy

a. *The historical setting of Christianity*

Ancient philosophy is the “classical” philosophy of Greece and Rome: the effort of reason alone to know the ultimate explanations of reality. It is particularly relevant for theology, since Christianity was born in the cultural area of the Roman Empire. The early Christians had to explain the faith to the pagans living in Graeco-Roman culture, and in so doing they had to give answers to the questions asked by those people: it is therefore important for us to know their philosophy.

Divine Revelation is not a philosophy: it did not receive any influence from any human source, but came directly from God. However, in developing the faith, the theologians used concepts which were there already. For example, those people in the Roman Empire knew very well that all men look for *happiness*; but they did not know *how* to attain it. Christian revelation would answer this question by saying that there is One God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that there is a divine plan of salvation for man whereby man will really attain happiness: the concept of “happiness” was already in their minds, and it is important to know what they usually understood by it, or by any other vital reality.

We should know their philosophy, then, not because it had any influence on Christian revelation, but because the theologians had to use concepts which the pagans already had, and then perfect them. These achievements of classical philosophy were used as instruments for the theology which was elaborated by Christian teachers. And this applies to all Christian theologians in those Christian centuries we have mentioned.

Most of those concepts were taken from three main sources: (i) Plato; (ii) Aristotle; (iii) Neo-Platonism. We shall examine them one by one, because they were the main sources *not* of Christian thought, but of that Christian philosophy which was needed to explain the faith.

In most cases, the elements which theologians took from these pagan sources were *improved* and *perfected*. And they were always *truths of natural philosophy*, not just “cultural” ideas or subjective interpretations. Whenever theologians accepted something from Plato, for example, it was not because it was from Plato, but because it was *true*. Truth is not something that can be nationalized, since it belongs to all cultures and races, to all men. That is why it is incorrect to say

that Christian theology is “hellenistic” or “Greek” or “Western”: it is simply *true*. Truth is above all those differences of climate or nation. The Christian theologians who accepted those truths reached by pagans, accepted them as truths of natural philosophy; but they improved them, purifying them from errors, making them clearer by comparing them with divine revelation, i.e. with the truth communicated by God.

So, when we get to know some of those philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, we are in a better position to understand Christian writers, especially the metaphysics of St. Thomas, because the great achievement of St. Thomas is precisely that he took some of the best insights of Plato and Aristotle, improving them and synthesizing them as we saw in [ch. 16, b](#).

However, these philosophies gave rise also to heresies, because of their mixture with errors. This too makes it important to know them, because error usually *recurs*, and so we can better trace it by knowing those sources.

b. Plato (427-348 B.C.)

From the dates we can see that Plato lies astride the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., the golden age of the political life of Athens. His deep interest was the life of man in society in so far as society could help man to reach his transcendent destiny beyond this life: the happiness of man.

He was educated in Athens under *Socrates*, who could not accept the current philosophy of the *sophists* (“intellectuals” of their time): a philosophy which consisted in the rejection of “truth”. They did not “believe” in truth, but only in “appearances”, in how “one sees things”, not in “what they are in themselves”; and that everything is in a state of flux and there is nothing permanent. For them, the important thing in life was to get ahead, to succeed, getting as much satisfaction as possible. Socrates rejected this entire philosophy as contrary to reason, since reason demands something stable and permanent. (cf. [ch. 6, e](#)). He managed with his manner of philosophizing to force the Sophists to admit that their rejection of the “truth” implied a self-contradiction: if one says that there is no truth, either he is telling the truth or not, and in either case he contradicts himself.

Socrates was firmly convinced that man is intelligent, that he differs from animals, and so he rose against the philosophy of the Sophists. Plato was one of his disciples, and when Socrates died, he travelled to southern Italy, which was also part of the Greek-speaking world, where he experimented his political theories, though not very

successfully. Then he returned to Athens, where he founded his school called the *Academy* (after the god Academos), in which he taught his philosophy. He wrote in the form of “dialogues”, with a very readable style, more literary and poetical than scholarly. Here is a sketch of his doctrine:

- (i) *Ideas* are the principles of all things.
- (ii) The *sensible* world participates in the ideas.
- (iii) *Human souls* fulfill themselves by the contemplation of the ideas.
- (iv) *Morality*, education and politics consist in communicating this contemplation to others.

Let us now briefly develop these four points: first, the “ideas”. We observe in the world certain realities like beauty, justice, goodness, etc. which are always found in a fragmentary and scattered way: we don't find beauty as such, but beautiful things; not justice as such, but just actions; not goodness as such, but good men, etc. These realities are found in the world *fragmented*, i.e. piece by piece, not in their fullness. So, they must exist, he said, *by themselves* in another world (*topos uranos* = a place in heaven), because if we see *images*, there must be a *model* (*archetypos*). These are the ideas or forms (*eidos*): the models of all things.

For everything that we can *define* (Socratic influence) there must exist an “idea” in that “world of ideas”. And these things we see around us *participate* in, or imitate the pure ideas. There seem to be two worlds: the world of things (sensible) and the world of ideas (intelligible); but the latter is the fundamental world according to Plato, while the other is only a “participation” or “imitation”.

As we saw in [ch. 16](#), St. Thomas hailed the idea of *participation*, but pointed out that Plato did not realize that *reality* is in the *act of being*, not in the “form” as such. Platonic metaphysics is therefore defective, since Plato was looking only at the “forms” or ideas, but without actuality of being these ideas are only *abstractions* and don't exist by themselves (Aristotle, on the other hand, understood that these “ideas” are only abstractions from reality, but then he said that the real thing is the world of “motion”, which is not entirely true either: the real world is that of *actuality of being*, which includes the “world of motion”).

“Participation” then should be understood in this sense: that everything that exists or has the act of being *participates* in the act of being because it *limits the act of being to what the thing is*. And this implies the existence of a *pure act of being*, which is not participated but is the *fullness* of the act of being: this is how the metaphysics of St. Thomas brightens the dimness of Platonic metaphysics (cf. [ch. 16, b](#)).

As for the *human soul*, Plato says that it is made for the contemplation of the ideas, in which its happiness is found. He first proves the existence of the human soul, and then its immortality. But he goes too far and “proves” also the “pre-existence” of souls, which is already an error (cf. [ch. 31, b](#)). The human soul is indeed immortal, but it does not exist *before* the body. He falls into this error because he conceives the human soul as *a being in itself* (a *complete* substance), which is like the motor of the body: for him, man is “a soul using a body”. Aristotle on the other hand, while realizing that the soul is the *substantial form* of the body, emphasizes the substantial union of body and soul so much that he can hardly see the immortality of the soul, and prefers not to discuss it. St. Thomas gets the best of both: all the positive proof from Plato for the immortality of the soul, plus the “hylomorphism” (matter-and-form doctrine) of Aristotle, which shows very clearly the unity of body and soul, and why the soul cannot exist before the body, as it is its *substantial form*. But when the body dies or disintegrates, the soul goes on living, since it is *spiritual* in nature (it performs the *spiritual* operations of understanding and choosing), and so it cannot disintegrate, as it is not material at all. This is why it is fitting to think that the bodies will *rise again*, since the soul is *incomplete* without the body, even if it can go on living by itself.

Another Platonic error is to think that everything has a soul, not only man: there are souls everywhere, everything is animated. He held this belief from the Pythagoreans, very similar to Hindu beliefs: reincarnation of souls, etc. He believed that every planet or celestial body had a soul too, because it moved, and the soul is the “principle of motion”. Aristotle was more correct in conceiving the soul (*psyche*) as the principle of *immanent* motion or of *life*: there are many : kinds of souls as *degrees* of life, and the *spiritual* life of man requires a kind of soul which cannot in-form anything but a man (cf. [ch. 31](#)).

Lastly, for Plato, morality, education and politics consist in communicating the contemplation of ideas to others. We said earlier ([ch. 21, c](#)) that in studying the history of philosophy it is always important to see what philosophers say about God. For Plato, God is *the supreme soul or intelligence and the origin of all motion*. But he also calls “gods” the other intelligences which are under that “supreme” one: these are the “intermediary beings” identified with the “celestial bodies”, which are also “animated” by superior souls. These celestial bodies are somehow related to our lives, hence the belief in *astrology* or horoscopes, in some beings up there in the sky who rule our lives. This is one more form of that *determinism* which we discussed in [ch. 30, c](#).

By the contemplation of the ideas, the soul resembles God more and more. In order to achieve this, man must be righteous in this

life, and this is the beginning of that life of contemplation of the ideas which we will receive after this one. And what about *evil*? Evil, he says, is the punishment for error, and consists in being “embodied” again, i.e. reincarnated. In [ch. 31](#), we have already discussed these errors and the part of truth they contain. See also [ch. 38, e](#), for the correct notion of “moral sanction”.

c. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

As a young man, he came under Plato's influence when he went to Athens and joined the Academy. He sympathized with Plato on many points, but there was one on which he disagreed, namely *where reality is*. For him, reality is *in the sensible world*, not in the world of ideas. Raphael has immortalized this in his fresco representing an old Plato pointing his index finger upward, facing a young Aristotle pointing it downward.

Thus, Aristotle eventually left the Academy and set up his own school, which he called *Lycaeum*, where he taught the *natural sciences*. In the Academy, on the other hand, the teaching was based rather on *mathematics* as more “ideal”, while the natural sciences are about *real things* (in fact, Plato denied that there could be such sciences): Aristotle made many notable contributions to them, especially in biology.

For Aristotle, we have to start with the material world, i.e. the world of motion, of things that move. Now, the principle of a “thing that moves” is called in Greek *physis*: hence, *physica* = things that move. Motion here means not only change of place or linear motion, but any change, like the growth of a flower or a step in the reasoning process. Then, from Physics he goes to *metaphysics*, although he did not actually use this word: it was coined two centuries later, when his books were compiled, to designate the books that came *after* the Physics (*meta* = after). However, St. Thomas remarked that this term was well chosen, since metaphysics deals with what is *beyond* physics.

And thence he goes to Logic, which is *our manner* of knowing reality. “Logic” comes from the Greek *logos*, which means “thought”, although originally it means “gathering into one what is scattered”, which is what we do when we think, when we form our *concepts*: our concept of “animal”, for example, is one, but it is formed out of many kinds of animals. Logic then is the science of thought.

And finally, for Aristotle the most important knowledge to acquire comes at the end: after studying Physics, Metaphysics and Logic, we are prepared to tackle Ethics and Politics, which is the most

valuable knowledge because it deals with the happiness of man and society.

Now, let us summarize the main points of Aristotle's doctrine under five headings: (i) Physics; (ii) Metaphysics; (iii) God; (iv) Man; (v) Ethics.

(i) In Physics, he says that there are two kinds of changes in material things: (a) changes which do not alter the substance, since they are only accidental, and (b) real substantial transformations. This leads him to discover that bodies are composed of two principles: the *matter* (principle of undifferentiation) and the *form* (principle of differentiation); the former *underlies* the changes, and the latter *determines* them. The Greek for “matter” or “common stuff” is *hyle*, and for “form” *morphe*, hence *hylomorphism* or matter-and-form doctrine.

This is one of the most valuable achievements of natural philosophy, and fully acceptable to Christian philosophy, which has used it extensively, for example, in sacramental theology. The same applies to the substance-and-accidents doctrine, which has multiple applications in theology. When the Church uses these concepts in her dogmatic definitions, however, it is not as “Aristotelian” concepts or “Greek” concepts, but as real metaphysical concepts mirroring realities in full view of *all* men of *all* ages, of *all* cultures, of *all* places: that for example a thing cannot become something else unless it has the ability to do so (act-and-potency doctrine) is a truth which is above all differences of time and place.

Aristotle discovered that “motion” is something very real, contrary to what Plato and others thought, who said that change is a sort of illusion, that the only thing that is real is *what does not change*. Aristotle explained the reality of change or motion as “an act, though imperfect”, i.e. an act in the process of passing from potency. Thus, he defines motion as “the act of a being which is still in potency, for as long as it is still in potency” (cf. [ch. 7, b](#) and [c](#); [13, a](#), and [14, b](#)). And then he also discovered that *time* is the measure of motion: there are things that move, and the measure of that movement in respect of the “before” and the “after” (succession) is called “time”.

Another Aristotelian discovery is *quantity* as the first accident derived from matter, but *distinct* from corporeal substance, which is also a very important metaphysical truth for theology (cf. [ch. 13, a](#) and [b](#)). On the other hand, Aristotle fell also into Plato's error of thinking that celestial bodies are also “animated”, which highlights the difference between what is conditioned by “culture” and therefore *dated* (i.e. either “out-of-date” or “up-to-date”), and what is *true* regardless of culture. And the test to tell the difference is the candid observation of reality, without allowing the imagination or the emotions to distort the view (cf. [ch. 9, e](#)).

(ii) Aristotle conceives Metaphysics as the science of the First Cause, and of “being as being” and the properties of being: we have followed this conception and approach in Parts III and IV, as well as in Part II, [ch. 7](#), and we have seen how acceptable it is to a Christian philosophy. Among Aristotle’s other discoveries in metaphysics, we can mention: (a) the principle of non-contradiction as first principle of being; (b) the analogy of being; (c) the ten categories of being: one substance and nine accidents; (d) act and potency; (e) the four causes: formal, material, efficient, final. We can say, therefore, that Aristotle is the greatest metaphysician before Christianity.

(iii) However, his idea of God is also imperfect, like Plato’s, but still remarkably lofty taking into account that the Greeks were polytheistic. It is an achievement for Plato to have conceived of *one* God (monotheism), even though he also calls gods the “intermediary beings”, as we saw. But Aristotle went farther than Plato by conceiving God as the First Mover and the First Cause, and calling Him Pure Act. Furthermore, he conceived God as the Final Cause. However, he did not see God as the Efficient Cause of the movements taking place here in the universe: for him, God is only the *First* Mover, but then all subsequent motions go by themselves (cf. [ch. 18, d](#)). Thus, he also rejects divine Providence (cf. [ch. 24, g](#)).

(iv) On the topic of *man*, Aristotle surpasses Plato again. As we have seen, he regards the human soul as the substantial form of the body, which rules out reincarnation (his consequent difficulties about the immortality of the soul were dispelled by St. Thomas, as we saw in [ch. 31](#)). Another achievement of Aristotle in this respect is his study of the sensitive life and the intellectual life in man. In the former, he deals with the “external” and “internal” senses, and with the emotions or passions (cf. [ch. 27, a](#), and [29, a](#)). And in the intellectual life, he distinguishes between the “active” and “passive” intellect, and masterfully describes the process of “abstraction” (cf. [ch. 27, b](#)).

(v) Lastly, in Ethics he is concerned with the happiness of man *in society*. All men seek what is good. And what is the *best* thing for man? His classical answer is that the good proper to man must be *the best “act” of his best “potency” bearing upon the best “object”*, which is found in the contemplation of God and the practice of the virtues of the intellectual life (cf. [ch. 34, d](#); [38, f](#); [39, g](#), and [40, a](#)). But since man lives in society, he must also practise the virtues needed for his living together with other men: prudence first, and then justice, fortitude and temperance.

So, this is Aristotle: great achievements and some errors (other errors: that slavery is part of the natural law, and that the State has the right to limit population growth). As we said, St. Thomas hailed his philosophy, but he purified it from its errors and perfected it. For

example, regarding “act and potency”, St. Thomas made use of these concepts in a way that went well beyond what Aristotle had ever conceived. Aristotle never thought of the act “of being” (*actus essendi*): his vision was confined to the “physical” world, while for St. Thomas, actuality means above all actuality “of being”, a more metaphysical vision. Aristotle's incomplete vision prevented him from seeing God as “acting” on everything (cf. [ch. 24, f](#)).

Aristotle conceived God as the First Mover *but outside the world*, because of his defective concept of “act”, which is more physical than metaphysical. What St. Thomas did was to take this concept and raise it to a metaphysical plane, and then he combined it with Plato's concept of “participation”. But he did all this under the guiding light of the faith, since it is the Bible that describes God as HE WHO IS (Exodus, 3): he saw that God *is* the fullness of being, the very *Act of Being*, the perfection of being, the subsistent act of being; and everything else is a participation in the act of being, which must be created by God “out of nothing”, since God cannot share His *infinite* act of being ([ch. 4, b](#); [16, b](#); [18, d](#); [23, a](#); [24, e](#)).

d. Neo-Platonism

This is the most influential philosophy in the so-called period of Hellenism after Aristotle. The political crises following the dismemberment of Alexander's Empire sank the Greek world into a mood of pessimism, expressed in esoteric religions and moral philosophies “of salvation”, such as the fatalism of the Stoics and the hedonism of the Epicureans.

Neo-Platonism, the strongest of these movements, was a combination of Plato and Aristotle. It originated with Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Christ (see previous chapter), and reached its peak with *Plotinus* in the 3rd century A.D.

Christians found in it some elements which could be accepted, like its concept of the transcendence of God; and other elements which had a negative influence. And we can also say that both these kinds of elements came one way or another from either Plato or Aristotle.

The Neo-Platonist tradition extended well into the Christian centuries, and affected Arab philosophy also very deeply. The gist of it is that all beings proceed from *the One* in a graded hierarchy of perfection. But how this “procession” or “emanation” takes place can be interpreted in many ways, hence the errors of some neo-platonist Christians, regarding such doctrines as the Blessed Trinity and Creation.

On the other hand, some of the best insights of Plotinus had a deep impact on St. Augustine, as we shall see. And St. Thomas Aquinas accepted all true achievements of Neo-Platonism, such as the hierarchy of participation in being, and the absolute transcendence of God. In our next chapter, we shall see more aspects of the influence of Neo-Platonism on Christian thinkers.

CHAPTER 10

The History of Philosophy

a. Metaphysics and truth

We have discussed philosophy in general; then metaphysics, which is the “first” philosophy, and then all other parts of philosophy related to it. Now, metaphysical knowledge is achieved by human intelligence *throughout history*.

We can see, for example, how certain Greek philosophers reached the concept of final cause or of efficient cause and so forth. It is therefore useful to study the history of metaphysics.

We should, however, not confuse the history of metaphysics with metaphysics itself. The fact that this most noble human science was elaborated through history does not mean that the object of it *is* historical or bound to history. As we shall see, its object is *being*, and this is related to *immutable truth*. When we reach God, who is the crowning study of metaphysics, we are beyond all history and all time: we are looking at eternity.

This is why although metaphysics may have developed through history, it is not bound to any historical conditions or circumstances. There is no such thing as a Greek metaphysics as distinct from an Indian or Chinese metaphysics, as there is no German physics as distinct from Russian or American physics. We can only “nationalize” things which are purely superficial and external. When we get to reality as such (the object of science and wisdom), it is the same for all “cultures”: the common heritage of mankind, the level of humanity as such.

b. Cultural relativism

Metaphysics deals with the eternal and immutable truth about God, with the total dependence of creatures on God, and with the *moral* consequences of this dependence. Moral philosophy or *ethics* is rooted in metaphysics, and so lies at a deeper level than any cultural surface. The so-called *cultural traits* of a particular society are not identical with *moral values*, since these are common to all mankind and not subject to change due to circumstances of place or of time. It is not true that “morality is changing all the time”, that since the

morality of the Papuas is not the same as that of the Indians and so forth it is relative to culture and to changes in time, that what was valid for our ancestors is no longer valid for modern man, etc.

Morality is not subject to change since it is anchored in God and in the existential dependence of the creature on God as the fullness of being (see Ethics, below).

When we study the history of philosophy, therefore, it is not in order to just review all the different opinions on moral matters, or the different schools of thought and philosophies, more or less implying that morals or metaphysics is subject to change. In fact, when we study history, we find that in the material progress which has undoubtedly taken place, we may discover a certain pattern of continuous growth, but this has not always been matched by a corresponding growth in metaphysical wisdom and thereby moral excellence. Indeed, there have been periods of outright retrogression in moral outlook and practice accompanying material progress. Specifically, the decline of metaphysics since the Protestant revolt of the 16th century has been accompanied by a steady moral decline, which is quite logical given the dependence of morals on metaphysics.

Thus, the history of philosophy has come to mean, for many, a history of thought or ideas, rather than the history of *philosophy*, i.e. of the search for wisdom, of the exciting adventure into metaphysics. When people are no longer interested in metaphysics, they just become collectors of opinions and theories, beautiful “ideas” having lost touch with reality. This is the trend towards *relativism*: making all so- called values relative to the culture of the time, to what is “generally accepted” here and now, and practically eliminating all *absolutes*, all permanent realities.

This tendency has also affected theological studies and given rise to theological errors. Theological errors are called heresies, when they are still maintained after having been denounced as errors. Nowadays the number of heresies proliferating has reached unparalleled proportions, even though they are usually recurrences of past heresies due to relativism, historicism and the decline of metaphysics.

In the face of this challenge, the attitude of the Christian cannot be that of compromising and going along with errors just because they are “modern”, but that of upholding his faith as the ultimate standard of truth, and judging all other things in the light of his faith: “My words will not pass away” (Mt. 24:35), even if “heaven and earth will pass away”, all the historical civilizations and periods. “My words will not pass away”, that is, what does not change: God and our faith; but also metaphysics, which deals with God and the dependence of the creature on the Creator. This is what the Christian has to do: to take a

stand on good knowledge of his faith, which means theological knowledge, and therefore, with a good metaphysical grounding, because we cannot have a good theological knowledge without metaphysics.

This leads us now to the study of that “science of being” more in detail after this introduction we have just sketched. We must realize the inevitability of the intellectual labor and toil involved in such a study, but also the joy of being able to cast a glance, however precarious, at the totality of being, at reality as a whole. This next Part III of our study of Christian philosophy is thus the pivotal part of the entire book, to which all the other Parts should be referred.

CHAPTER 43

Rights and Justice

a. Nature of the juridical order: the juridical mind

We have seen that justice must be the first concern of political government, and the law is its instrument. The object of justice is *ius* (Latin) = *what is due to another as its good*; hence the derivation “duty”. *Ius* is translated into English as “right”. “Right” and “duty” are thus correlative concepts.

This “due” may be either by natural law (natural rights) or by human positive law (civil rights). And the latter may be either by *public* law (passed by the State) or by *private* right (private contracts publicly recognized).

St. Thomas distinguished between “general” and “particular” justice: the former is directly ordained to the common good, and the latter to a particular aspect of it.

General justice can also be called “social justice” if *directed to society as a whole* as an expression of “love of neighbor” (cf. [ch. 37, c](#)); or it can also be called “distributive justice” if it is the justice of the State towards the citizens. On the other hand, particular justice can be called “legal justice” if it is the justice due to the just laws of the State, or “commutative justice” which is the justice between individuals in exchange.

The juridical mind, which should therefore characterize civilized man, consists in being actually conscious of the requirements of the common good and all the aspects of justice.

b. Rights and duties

The “object” of justice is *what is due*, and the “subject” of justice is *the person to whom it is due*. He who owes, is “bound” to give what is due: this “binding” is called *obligation* or *duty*.

The subject of justice has a twofold relationship (i) to what belongs to him; (ii) to his debtor. The first relationship (*objective right*) is a power or dominion whereby he is the owner of the thing; and the second one is called *subjective right* in relation to the debtor, and is based on the former.

The most important thing to note is that *every right is a right to something good*, since right is based on duty, duty is based on need,

and need is ordained to the good or perfection of being (cf. [ch. 19, e](#) and [f](#)). This excludes the so-called “right to die” of euthanasia or suicide, for example. And no one has the “obligation” to do anything bad.

The ultimate foundation of right is not subjective, or pure obligation, since rights exist and are good only in so far as they are related *to the right end*. Every human being has certain *natural rights* emanating from his due ordination to the good. No one can remove them from him or her (“inalienable”), and he or she has them from the very moment of his or her conception (cf. [ch. 17, b](#), and [21, a, in fine](#)). These are the right to life; to education; to use the means to reach God; to choose one's state in life; to work; to possess material goods; to reputation; to associate oneself with others; to be told the truth; etc. When these natural rights are publicly recognized by positive law, they become also *civil rights*, although the latter can also be additional rights by public enactment.

All these rights must be exercised *with order*, i.e. with due regard to the common good, which is the good of *all men*: everyone has the *duty* to respect the rights of others.

c. Private property

The subject or bearer of something good, when he has it with mastery over it, i.e. with the power to use it or not to use it, is said to have it with dominion or *ownership*. The root of ownership is, therefore, freedom, and there should be no ownership which is not *regulated by its ordination to the last end*.

The possessor is the master or owner, but strictly speaking there is no absolute ownership or mastery in any creature, since all things in the universe are means in relation to the Last End, which is God, and only God is the Master or Lord of everything, as Creator: God is the First Cause of the total *esse* of everything (cf. [ch. 24, e](#)).

Therefore, the creature has no “rights” in relation to God: God does not “owe” anything to the creature. On the other hand, the creature has an absolute obligation towards God, since the creature “owes” everything to God. This means that every just ownership is *under God* (participated): otherwise, it is not “ownership”, but its corruption.

When this mastery or ownership is of *material* things, it is called *property*. The first mastery that man has is his freedom of activity. This mastery over his own acts, and consequently over external things, is measured by its *ordination to the good*. And so, if he possesses material goods, it must be in order to use them *for the sake of spiritual*

goods (cf. [ch. 31, c](#), and [32, c](#)). Property, therefore, whether personal or collective, and property rights are based on the ordination to the good.

Consequently, theories which take private property as an “absolute” right overlook this final ordination to the good. It is lawful and natural that man should own material things, even privately or individually, since they are all at his service: the totality of material goods is for *all* men. But this does not prevent the individual from having the right to possess *some* of those external things. He may choose not to exercise that right, but the right continues to exist, although it has to be exercised in the context of the common good, as we have seen (cf. [ch. 25, e](#)).

Aside from “private” property, we can also speak of *common* or collective property, as it may exist for instance in a family. A family or a group may decide to own all they possess in common collectively, because they choose to do so. But this system of ownership cannot be imposed by force, let alone claiming that it is something “required by nature”: the *individual* always retains the natural right to own private property.

And there is also *public* property: the possession belonging to an entire civil society vested on the State. This kind of property may be fitting or advisable for certain goods, but *always as long as it is for the common good*. Were it to eliminate private and common property altogether, it would violate the *principle of subsidiarity* (cf. [ch. 40, c](#), and [42, a](#)). This usually occurs when the State has made itself the “ultimate common good”, and it is accompanied by other manifestations of *totalitarianism* contrary to the freedom of man and of the family.

On the other hand, private property acts as a stimulant for the better utilization of goods. Nevertheless, it is no more than a *particular* good, not the common good, and thus it has to be ordained to the common good in order to achieve *social justice* (cf. [ch. 38, d in fine](#); [42, c](#), and [43, a](#)). Therefore, the State has the obligation to *regulate* private property, by means of suitable laws that respect the rights of the individual and of the family, so that it is not used against the common good.

CHAPTER 42

Government, Authority and Laws

a. Government and politics

“Social order” means society *with government*, since “government” is the agency that brings things to their end, and “order” is the relationship and orientation of things to their end. Now, the end of society is God, as we have seen in [ch. 37](#), and therefore the happiness of all the members of society is the consequence of attaining this End (cf. [ch. 36, d](#)).

The need for government in society arises from the *division of labor*: in order to coordinate all for the common good, someone is needed to lead, or else there will be interferences, encroachments (even involuntary), redundancies and overlapping (cf. [ch. 40, c](#)). Government is required as the conductor of an orchestra, without whom there would be no harmony, and there would be discord even if one had the best musicians with the best instruments.

The actual task of governing is the art of politics (cf. [ch. 40, a](#)) or political activity. Those engaged in this “public service” constitute the “government”, and a society organized with government and laws is called “State”.

Human activity cannot, of course, be *reduced* to political activity, nor can the latter be *reduced* to economic activity, since man transcends both matter and society. Political activity is basically *moral*, not just a technique, or the machine of government, or economic activity. The goal of government in civil society is the *temporal* common good, which is *both spiritual and material*. “Temporal” is not equivalent to “material”, just as “spiritual” is not equivalent to “eternal”. The “spiritual” is anything where man is involved, whether in this life (temporal) or in the next (eternal). It is with the latter that the Church is concerned as its own proper domain.

There is thus *continuity* between the temporal common good (State) and the eternal common good (Church), although there is a *distinction*. This tends to be misunderstood by the expression “separation of Church and State”. Strictly speaking, they should not be “separated” since they have common areas of responsibility, namely all that has to do with *morality* or what leads men to their Last End. However, they should indeed be *distinguished*, as (i) they have exclusive areas of their own competence (e.g. for the State: the system of government or the fiscal laws; for the Church: the

administration of the sacraments), and (ii) their respective authorities are different in nature, although both come from God: one is “natural” (State) and the other “supernatural” (Church).

In what is strictly temporal, the Church can only give orientation as to the *moral* principles involved, not as to the final choice, since temporal realities are always changing and multiple, and therefore optional. And in what is strictly supernatural, the State has no competence, although it should both (i) protect and facilitate public morals, as related to the eternal, and (ii) favor and facilitate the worship of God in accordance with the common good.

Other aspects of the activity of the State can be mentioned as follows:

(i) Politics is for the sake of the *good*, i.e. the total good of man. Therefore, *economic* development cannot be the goal of politics, but only a means: material values are always for the sake of spiritual values (cf. [ch. 25, e](#)).

(ii) The end of society is God, the Social Common Good (cf. [ch. 40, c](#)). In order to promote this, the State has to uphold *justice* through the laws, by passing them, applying them, and enforcing them.

(iii) The State has to correct what is out of order in society and to coordinate activities, since it has the overall view of society and the power to rule.

(iv) The State has *supplementary* functions (like monopolizing a public utility which is very necessary and which the private sector is not in a position to handle), and a *subsidiary* function which consists in helping the parts of society but without supplanting them, like in the field of education, for instance (cf. [ch. 38, b](#), and [40, c](#)).

Lastly, there are many different “systems” of government, depending on the changing cultural and historical circumstances. The standard of their goodness is the unchanging and universal natural law (cf. [ch. 38, a](#) and [b](#)): they are good to the extent that they lead men to their Last End and recognize the dignity of the human person.

b. Authority and obedience

As we have seen in [ch. 33, a](#) and [f](#), and [40, c](#) and [f](#), government implies authority *over* other persons who are essentially *free* and *equal*. Consequently:

(i) Political authority is received *from God*, since no man has the intrinsic power to give *himself* authority over others.

(ii) No ruler can enslave those who are ruled: it is in agreement

with the natural law that the latter should accept the rulers freely.

(iii) Authority, however, does not come from the people, but from God: it is a *participation* in God's government of the universe and of men.

(iv) Whoever governs, therefore, does it by sharing in God's providence (cf. [ch. 24, g](#)), and thus he has no absolute power and is subject to the natural law.

(v) Obedience is strictly due to political authority, as long as this authority is just, i.e. governs according to the natural law.

As a lesser evil, however, it is sometimes better to obey an unjust government, but what should never be done is to obey against the law of God. The task of the ruler is to communicate the good by ensuring the proper functioning of all the parts and ordaining them all towards their end, while respecting their differences.

As the ruler has to command and to judge, he needs the virtues of prudence and justice above all. The obedience of those who are governed is an act of freedom (the dignity of man is that he directs himself by himself) and an act of personal responsibility. To the extent that man is free, he *wants* to obey, i.e. he knows what he is doing: for this he has to see the ordination of the law to the common good. The aim of education (at home, in school and in society at large) is to make man aware of this responsibility and of this freedom, by making him see the ordination of all things to the common good, i.e. to God, and the part he has to play personally in the service of the common good.

c. Positive law

The *positive law* (laws made by men in authority for the government of society) is the basic instrument of government for the direction of society towards the common good. There should be *stable* laws, because if civil ordering were to be left to the decisions of private individuals or to the rulers themselves, it would easily be corrupted by "might is right". Since the purpose of the laws is to direct men to the common good, they must facilitate the practice of virtue and discourage vice. This is why the *juridical order*, i.e. the accepted framework of clearly recognized and stipulated duties and rights, is profoundly good.

For all these reasons, there must be an ordering *of reason* towards the common good (see St. Thomas' definition in [ch. 38, a](#)), instead of the *arbitrary* will of someone. The juridical order itself is good: it is the persons that may be good or bad. If the person is good, he fulfills the law without effort, spontaneously: otherwise, he fulfills it

out of fear of the penalty.

The positive law depends *on* the *natural law* and derives all its binding force from it, since it directs man to the common good, which is God. If it goes against the natural law, it becomes violence: it is no longer “law”, and has to be resisted (cf. [ch. 40, f](#)). From the content of the natural law (cf. [ch. 38, c](#) and [d](#)) we can glean what is contrary to it: all that goes against the dignity of human life and its ordination to God.

The positive law is thus a participation in the natural law made by free persons. But the natural law is necessarily wider than the positive, since the latter cannot legislate *on the internal acts of man directly*: no human authority can penetrate the interior life of man. And besides, the changing and multiple circumstances of society give rise to many different applications of the natural law. Every man has to realize that social justice and love (natural law) must necessarily go beyond strictly “legal” justice (positive law).

CHAPTER 20

Concluding Review of Metaphysics

a. The analogy of being and our knowledge of God

As we saw in [ch. 11, c](#), the analogy of being means that “being” is predicated of its subjects partly in the same sense and partly in a different sense. In [ch. 16, c](#), we saw that the basis of that analogy is that being is participated: in proportion to this participation, being is *more* or *less*. All beings are the same in the sense that they *are*; but they are different due to their degree of participation.

The analogy of being is particularly important in theology, since it enables us to see how and to what extent we can apply our human concepts to God to express the existence and life of God. We can say, for example, that God is just, not with the justice we would attribute to a man, but with the infinite justice which corresponds to the infinite being: the justice of man is in a way like the justice of God, but it is more unlike it than like it. Nevertheless, it is a concept which we can apply to God, although, of course, with analogy only, not in the same sense. Our terms cannot be applied to God *univocally* (in the same sense): therefore, were we to deny that there is such a thing as analogy, we would not be able to apply any of our concepts to God, and so God would remain absolutely unknown to us (agnosticism). We shall see this in the next chapter.

b. Natural and supernatural wisdom

The final conclusion of the entire metaphysical road, which we have just sketched, is that metaphysics is wisdom of the natural order. It is the highest science in the natural order, but it is surpassed by *supernatural* theology (see [ch. 3, a](#)).

Therefore, it belongs to metaphysics to direct all the other sciences in some way: to draw up a charter, so to speak, for each, so that they do not step beyond their boundaries. This does not mean, of course, that metaphysics has to tell the sciences how to carry out their investigation: it simply gives them a global view of reality, so that they do not step beyond their own partial view, as was explained in [ch. 8](#).

Furthermore, all the other sciences are somehow ordained to metaphysics as to their end, because metaphysics is ordained to God

as First Cause and Last End. And it is through the principle of causality that metaphysics can reach this final objective, i.e. by rising from the “effect”, which is the creature, to the cause, which is God (cf. Wisdom 13:1-5 and Rom. 1:20).

However, since the being of God is not confined to *being the cause of beings*, the knowledge of God *in Himself*, and of all other things in Him, is incomparably greater than metaphysics. Only God has this knowledge, but He has communicated it partially to us through *divine revelation*. Therefore, our knowledge through our faith in that revelation is incomparably higher than our knowledge through reason alone. And that “supernatural” theology *through faith* is the highest wisdom we can reach, although it makes use of the natural wisdom of metaphysics and its correlation with divine revelation, thus making metaphysics a kind of bridge with those who have not received that divine revelation: this is the approach of St. Thomas in his *Summa contra gentiles*, as mentioned in the Foreword.



PART III METAPHYSICS



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Transcendental Modes of Being

(*Partial Text from “*Philosophy of Being*,” Oliva Blanchette)

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Introduction: Transcendental Modes of Being

A science must determine not only its subject, what it is about, but also the properties of this subject as it is understood in that science. Thus mathematical physics must determine its subject matter, what aspect of being it is about, and then say what the properties of this subject matter are, however these may be understood. So too biology, which is about life, must determine the properties of life. Similarly metaphysics, as a science or a systematic discourse, has to consider not only being as being, but also whatever pertains to being precisely as being, what we can refer to as the properties of being, though in a way analogous to being itself and not to any other kind of property. Having just arrived at the analogy of being we must not lose sight of this analogy in speaking of its properties.

In fact, given this analogy, we find ourselves in a perplexity with regard to any properties of being as being. If "being" signifies according to a mode of concretion and composition, can anything else be predicated of it apart from this mode of concretion and composition? If "being" actually contains the differences of whatever there is, since otherwise these differences would not be, is there anything that can be said of being as being apart from these differences, which, as differences of being, are not properties of being as being?

This perplexity must be understood clearly. The question of properties must not be confused with that of differences. To bring out the analogy of being we had to insist on the differences or the diversity of being. The question was to see how being could still be one in all its differences, whether essential or accidental. These differences, however, real as they are in their being, cannot be predicated of being precisely as being. What constitutes them as differences is what sets one kind of being off from another or one particular being from another being. What can be predicated of one as a property cannot be predicated of the other as a property because of this difference. This is true even of individual differences within one and the same kind of being. Properties, on the other hand, have to be predicated of their subject as such. They belong to their subject precisely as this subject has been determined in a science, as the properties of life belong to this kind of being, that is, the living, precisely as determined. Hence, since our subject has been determined to be being as being, the properties of being must be predicated of being precisely as being, and, since this subject has been determined to contain its differences,

the properties must be said of the differences as well. The properties too must be analogous, for otherwise, if the properties were univocal, to predicate them of being would be to say that there is still something univocal about being. If being is analogous, so too must its properties be.

But how are such properties to be understood and what do they add to what we mean by "being"? To understand this question, let us reflect on how anything can be added to being. In one sense nothing can be added to being, inasmuch as being includes everything and excludes nothing. There is nothing that could be added to being that is not already included in it. But the thought or the concept of being does not immediately express all that being contains for us. As we saw, being signifies according to a mode of concretion and composition. It contains differences that the concept of being alone does not express. As a structured notion, it says not merely that something is, but also that as *something* and as *this* it has differences. In this it differs from a generic notion, which can abstract from its differences. But as a notion, being as being does not express the differences that it contains structurally. These must be added to it more expressly.

It is not as though these differences were added from outside being, so to speak. Even our first conception of being contains these differences. We do not conceive of anything in the direct exercise of judgment as being without differences. But as our first concept into which all our other concepts must be resolved, as into their first, it does not yet contain the differences expressed in these other concepts. As it presents itself, being is disclosed with its differences. But as we first conceive it, we leave out the differences to name only being as being. Having done so, we must then add the differences, or our conceptions of the differences, to our first concept, with which we begin. For, as we have said from the very beginning, knowing is of being. It is with being that we begin and being is itself the beginning of knowing. But it is only the beginning, to which other conceptions, or conceptions of differences, must be added. These further conceptions, as Aquinas puts it, express its *mode*, which is not expressed by the name of being itself (*Ver I, I, c*).

But this process of addition to our original concept of being takes place in two ways that must be clearly distinguished in order to get a proper understanding of properties of being. These properties are also added to being, but not in the way of differences. The first way of adding to our original concept of being is the way we have just seen in connection with the differences of being, where the mode expressed is a particular mode of being, such as living being or quantitative being. In this way we come to distinguish diverse categories of things on the

basis of diverse modes of being that we recognize. This is the way that enables us to distinguish different ontic regions in what we referred to earlier as the "predicamental order."

In the second way, however, we transcend this predicamental order, which is still tied to the direct exercise of judgment and to the way we experience being immediately, and we enter more properly into the transcendental order of being itself. In this way what is said more expressly in adding to our first conception of being is not some special mode of being, such as could be expressed in a category, but a common mode that follows every being and therefore, like being itself, transcends all categories. Thus, if many different modes of being can be distinguished and all of them can be said to be, each in its way, so too whatever can be said more expressly of being in this common transcendental way will also be said of each mode of being, each in its own way. If, for example, unity can be said of being in this common way or as a common mode, then every being will also be said to be one in the same way or according to the same mode that it is. The more common mode does not express a difference of being, but follows the differences as being does. It is this more general mode of expression that gives rise to what we are calling the "properties of being," conceptions that can be predicated of being as being. We can refer to these conceptions as properly ontological, as distinct from ontic differences. But they have also been called *transcendental*, insofar as they follow the transcendentality of being.

Thing can be thought of as such an ontological conception distinct from the conception of being. Many are inclined to identify or to reduce the conception of being to the conception of thing. As we have seen, however, the two names or ideas are taken from different aspects in the structure of our conception of being. *Being* is taken from the act of being, which is the most comprehensive aspect of being as a whole, while *thing* is taken from the quiddity or the essence, which is the restrictive aspect of the finite being. The conception of being is thus ontological and transcendental in the broadest and most fundamental sense possible. But the conception of thing is nevertheless ontological and transcendental insofar as it signifies a being in its concrete essence.

In its own standing, or according to its essence, such a thing is not understood as transcendental. It has its own differences, specific and individual, that set it off from other kinds of being and other individuals of the same kind. But insofar as it has an essence or its own standing with its own differences, it is part of the transcendental order of being. Every finite being is understood as a composite of an act of being and an essence. What makes each specific and individual

are its differences, not the composition. In defining a thing we include these differences, at least down to the specific differences, but not the idea of essence as such, which is the principle of definition and not one of the defining notes. The idea of essence is present in any definition of a determinate being but is not restricted to any particular definition. As taken from the essence as such, and not from any particular essence, the name "thing" is equally unrestricted. We speak of all sorts of beings and of many different individuals as things. In doing so we understand that they have their differences as things, but in speaking of them only as things we do not include any of these differences, just as in speaking of them only as being we do not include their differences.

In fact, in keeping with what we said about the primary analogate of being, what we first think of as a thing is a human being, which has its standing in being in the presence of another human being through mutual recognition. This is a thing with very specific as well as individual differences not expressed in the concept of thing but included in its standing or its essence. The human being is a thing that stands up to another human being in speech. It is also a sentient and living thing. In the direct exercise of judgment we also speak of other kinds of things that stand in being, but not as rational, though sentient and living, and others that are not sentient, though living, and of others still that are not living. Anything we think of as having a standing in being through its own essence we think of as a thing in some degree of being. Those things we think of as having their standing without the difference of rationality, or sensation, or life, we think of as mere things, but we do think of them as having a standing in being, albeit a very diminished one in comparison with that of a human being. On the other hand, we do not stop thinking of the human being as a thing with its own standing in being. We think of it as much more of a thing, or much more than a mere thing.

It can be argued, as we did for the primary analogate of being, that the diminished meaning of thinghood in a mere thing is not its first or original meaning. The first thing, literally, I come to discern as standing in being is a self, myself in the presence of another self or another self present to me. *This* and *that* originally refers to me and to you, the most primordial objects of human consciousness, so to speak. As we said earlier in speaking of the order of learning in the analogy of being, it is only from this first discernment of two different selves or things that we proceed to the discernment of further and lesser objects, extending our initial conception of thing as selfstanding to other kinds of things, sentient nonrational things, living nonsentient things, or nonliving things, all the way down to the entities or "things" of

mathematical physics.

There, of course, the conception of thing is stripped of any personal difference it might have with reference to self, sensation, or life, but it still expresses a kind of standing in which basic entities and processes coalesce. The concept of thing, as has been pointed out even for mathematical physics, expresses a unity, identity, whole in data "grasped, not by considering data from any abstractive viewpoint, but by taking them in their concrete individuality and in the totality of their aspects" (Lonergan 246). This conception of thing, which derives from an initial conception centering on self, is necessary for the continuity of scientific thought and development and for keeping it related to the concrete order of being as a whole.

Thing thus has to be thought of as an ontological conception that follows being in its transcendental order. Whatever is thought of as being is thought of as thing, as standing in being with its differences. Inasmuch as it expresses only the quiddity of being or its essence, the conception of thing has to be distinguished from the conception of being. But inasmuch as it expresses only the quiddity or essence of a finite being in its proper standing as being, it cannot be distinguished as a property in the transcendental order of being. "Thing" refers to what a determinate being is in itself or in its essence. In fact, in the direct exercise of judgment, properties are thought of as properties of things, as whiteness is thought of as the property of the thing snow and as risibility, or the ability to laugh, came to be thought of as the property of the thing human being. These are properties only in one particular order of being. They are not properties in the transcendental order of being, that is, properties that can be predicated of being according to its transcendental conception, or as it includes its differences.

What we mean by the properties of being are those ontological conceptions that are not reducible to thinghood but that pertain to being as transcendently ordered. These are the transcendental conceptions that were traditionally listed as the one, the true, and the good, to which we shall add the active in close association with the one. What these properties add more expressly to the thought of being remains to be seen as we come to examine how each one of them is derived from our first conception of being. But it is important to note at the outset that we do come to know them as derived from our first conception of being and that they do express more of the intelligibility of being than what we take to be our first conception of it in its structure as concrete and composite.

It is perhaps for having lost sight of these transcendentals, as

we saw with regard to Kant in connection with the transcendentality of being, that modern metaphysics has found itself locked in essentialism, unable to reopen the question of the *be of being*. While it has moved from the pure conception of being to a conception of thing (*res*) or "reality," which expresses quiddity or essence, it has not moved on to the conception of the one, the true, and the good in relation to the order of being as a whole. Its forgetfulness of the question of being in the fullness of that term has been due, at least in part, to its forgetfulness of these transcendentals, which has left it unable to think through the question of being to any kind of completion. What we hope to show here is that, by reopening the question of the transcendental properties of being as being, we can open a new way into metaphysics or the philosophy of being that will allow for coming to some further exercise of judgment about being as being. If being calls for thinking, this thinking can proceed ontologically only through the thought of the transcendental properties of being. In this respect the transcendental properties of being as being are the key to our reconstruction of metaphysics.

Without these transcendental ideas, which are coextensive with the concept of being, it is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate any understanding of the transcendental order of being. We have seen how the idea of being contains the differences of its inferiors. But with only our first conception of being to work with, it is difficult to see how all these differences in their rich diversity compose with being. The diversity is something given to us in the very presencing of being. But how to conceive this diversity in composition with *be* or the act of being is the problem that metaphysics must solve. Can we say immediately that the diversity entails a multiplicity of beings or is it more a matter of diversity within one and the same being? And whether there is a multiplicity of beings or only one being, can there be diversity within a being as well as among beings? And if there is diversity of whatever kind in being, how is the relation between the different aspects of this diversity to be understood in being? These are questions that have been part of metaphysics ever since Parmenides.

They are questions we shall have to deal with in exploring the structure and the communication of being. But in order to do so rationally we must have the added intelligibility of the transcendental properties of being. These transcendental properties cannot add anything to being as though from outside of being. Nor can they add by way of special modes of being, as differences do. They can only mediate between our first conception of being and that of thing and of the differences of being.

As properties of being, they are not even distinct from that of

which they are the property, as the properties of a specific thing might be. They are identical with being itself and yet enable us to articulate more of its intelligibility than we can without them. The distinction between them is not trivial or merely one of words. It is an opening of intelligibility into the transcendental order of being. Without the distinction of these properties, we would be reduced to speaking of being only as an abstraction or according to some of its differences in a particular order, as we do in the particular sciences. But with them we can plot a course or a discourse to include the whole of being in its be as well as in its essence or its many essences and differences. Though they add nothing to being as such, the transcendentals add considerably to our understanding of being, or to how we go about understanding being in its concretion and composition.

For them to do so, however, they must be derived purely from the thought of being as found in the direct exercise of judgment. The thought of the one, the active, the true, or the good are not precisely the thought of being. They add something to the thought of being. But what they add is itself derived from the thought of being, not through experience, which would only give us differences of being, but through reason alone or through thought as it expresses more completely how it understands being in its transcendental ordering.

Judgment about the properties of being, which has to be an indirect exercise of judgment, is thus *a priori* in two senses: it does not depend on experience in a way that would make it *a posteriori* and it proceeds from a prior conception, which is the original conception of being found in the direct exercise of judgment.

Though the properties of being come after our first conception of being, they follow from it necessarily. There is something that is immediately evident about them in the direct exercise of judgment, as we shall see, but some demonstration is necessary to show that they are indeed properties of being as being. Without a demonstration we might have some conception of these properties, since there is some immediate understanding of them in experience, but we would not understand them as the properties of being in its differences, which is what we must have if they are to serve in the elaboration of our metaphysical discourse.

Thus, like metaphysics itself, our conception of the transcendentals must follow from experience. It must rise *a posteriori* or *per posteriora* to what is prior conceptually not only with regard to being itself, as we have done in determining the subject of our inquiry, but also with regard to what we shall speak of as the one, the active, the true, the good, and whatever else may follow being as being.

Some kind of phenomenological reduction is therefore required to bring thought back to what is evident *per se*, but it is in a transcendental critical reflection that the priority of this evidence is seen. Our demonstration will consist in opening up this evidence for thought. It will not be a demonstration *a priori* in the sense that we could give a strict definition of being and from that definition derive its properties. Such a definition of the transcendentals is impossible for us. Our demonstration will be *a priori* only in the sense that it leads us from or through what is *a posteriori*, from experience, to a prior evidence in thought itself. It will be a demonstration in that one has to be led to such an evidence from experience as we had to be led to the evidence that metaphysics is the science about being as being through critical reflection on the direct exercise of judgment in experience and in the more particular sciences.

This is what we have had to do already with regard to our first conception of being itself, which has had to be demonstrated in its primordial evidence. Now we must do the same with our conceptions of the one, the active, the true, and the good. Starting from experience, we must demonstrate how they too are part of that original evidence, that is, how they follow necessarily from the original conception of being itself. Our judgment with regard to these properties will be synthetic, inasmuch they add something conceptually to being. It will also be *a priori*, in that it will not depend directly on experience but on the thought itself in experience that proceeds thoughtfully, without the need of any further "intuition," from the conception of being in its transcendental to the conception of the one, the active, the true, and the good. What it will depend on is the critical reflection found in any direct exercise of judgment that brings us back to the first evidence of being itself as it presents itself in actuality.

We shall proceed first with the conception of the one, which we most closely associate with the conception of being and of thing. Then, before proceeding with the conception of the true and the good, which require reference to a particular kind of being to be seen as properties of being, we shall focus on another property of being that was not usually mentioned among the transcendentals before modern philosophy, but which nevertheless is closely associated with our conception of being as one even as it opens the way for the inclusion of truth and goodness as properties of being, namely, the property of being as active.

We shall not include the conception of beauty, which is frequently mentioned as a transcendental, because in our view it is not coextensive with being precisely as being. It is coextensive with being only in a particular order, namely, that of being which is at once

spiritual and material. To speak of beauty as a property of being, that is, as coextensive with the entire order of being and not just with this particular order, one would have to speak of it in terms of some combination of goodness and truth, leaving out any reference to the particular order of matter that is implied in the conception of beauty.

CHAPTER 5

Being as One

We begin with *one* as the first property of being because it appears to be the one most intimately connected with being. This has been clear from the beginning of metaphysics with Parmenides, who spoke of being as one and continuous (Frag 8, 1—6), and as undivided, since it is all the same. He also spoke of it as even or uniform, inasmuch as being draws near only to being (Frag 8, 22). Because his conception of being was still univocal, however, his conception of unity remained one of impenetrable density that found expression only in the shape of perfect roundness and allowed for neither movement nor multiplicity.

In his perplexity over being the Stranger in Plato's *Sophist* noted the same connection between being and one and wondered why there are two names, if being and one are the same (*Soph* 244b). This is the question we must pursue here, but with the understanding that the notion of one does not signify anything more in reality than what is already signified by the notion of being.

Even after speaking of the analogy of being, Aristotle still maintained this parallel between being and one. He spoke of them as the same and as one nature, or of the one (*to hen*) as nothing other than being (*to on*), showing how both could be applied to a substance (*ousia*) such as human without adding anything to what was already understood with the substance itself. "As the substance of each thing is one not in any accidental sense, so also is anything that is [*hoper on ti*], so that there are as many forms of being as there are of the one" (*Metaph* 1003b 23—35). From this Aristotle concluded that metaphysics had to be as much a discussion of the one as of being, although he never gave priority to the one over being as Neoplatonism would later on. By speaking of this connection between being and the one in the framework of analogy, however, he did establish the idea of a certain convertibility between one and being that was to hold throughout most of the medieval period. *Ens et unum convertuntur*.

In the modern period the one who was to insist on the connection between being and one most emphatically was Spinoza with his conception of infinite substance as indivisible and unique (*Eth* XIIff). But this served only to exclude a plurality of substances in being and to reduce the analogy of being to that of one between substance and its modes. Kant, besides losing sight of the transcendental of

being, also did not admit the notion of infinite substance as having any gnoseological content. For him, the thought of unity was a pure concept of the understanding or a category under the heading of quantity, and so was bereft of any transcendentalism (*KrV BIII3f*). Hegel, who sought to complement Spinoza's concept of infinite substance with that of subjectivity without falling into the empty transcendentalism of Kant, restored the concept of the one to the Logic of Being, but he did so only in connection with being-for-self, in a dialectical rebounding from determinate being's interplay of finite and infinite (*WL I*, sect. 1, ch. 3). Coming before any discussion of quantity, Hegel's move allowed for a certain reopening of the transcendentalism of the one, but the opening was closed with the conception of measure as the combination of quality and quantity that eventually collapses into the Logic of Essence.

After Hegel the ontological conception of unity seems to drop from sight altogether in metaphysics. It continues to be used in the elaboration of any metaphysical system, whether physicalist, personalist, or theistic, or to be abused in the deconstruction of any such system. But it is not itself the focus of any reflection as a conception that is coextensive with the conception of being. What we propose to do here, in our attempt at metaphysical reconstruction, is to refocus on this notion of the one as it is connected with the notion of being in order to see what intelligibility it can add to our first conception of being.

We have already had to use a certain conception of the one in elaborating the idea of analogy. An analogous notion, we said, is one, not so much by univocity or a unity of concept, as by a unity of reference to one—*pros hen*. This implies a twofold understanding of unity: that of a concept, in which differences are prescinded from, and that of an order, in which differences are taken into account. In the second sense, unity is seen in reference to different things that come under the analogous notion by reason of their relation to one thing, the primary analogate, as in the case of healthy, which is predicated first of an organism and then secondarily of various things that are signs or causes of health in the organism. As an analogous notion being thus refers first to a primary analogate, which we first think of as being, and then to secondary analogates, which we then think of as related to what we first think of as being whether as sign, cause, or simply as a coordinate in being with differences. Our recognition of differences of being leads us to the conception of being as analogous. The same recognition also leads us to bring these differences under some kind of unity, whether it be that of a single being with different aspects or modes, as Spinoza claimed, or that of many beings with their own

differences in being ordered to one another, as we are more inclined to do in the direct exercise of judgment. It is to this unity that we must now turn to see how it follows from our very conception of being.

5.1 Undividedness and Identity

This conception of being, as it emerges from the direct exercise of judgment, is structured according to a mode of concretion and composition. It refers to things as we experience them, that is, not as a simple identity, but as a complexity of thisness or haecceity, whatness or quiddity, and be or act of being. Though the name being is taken from the act of being, we think of a being as a thing, which expresses its quiddity or essence. And it is this thing that we think of as one at the same time as we think of it as being. But we think of it as one only with relation to the differences of being and not simply to the thought of being as being. How does this come about in the direct exercise of judgment?

Just as being cannot be properly defined through genus and specific difference, since it is the principle of all definition, so also one, in its original and transcendental sense, cannot be properly defined. It can only be distinguished from being by introducing negation. To speak of being as one is to speak of it as undivided, as not divided, which presupposes some conception of division or of difference in being, a division or a difference that is then negated to arrive at the undividedness or the unity of being. This is the way Parmenides arrived at his conception of being as one. But this is also the way we arrive at the same conception through the exercise of judgment, with the difference that we start from experience and allow for real differences in being itself in accordance with the analogy of being.

In the direct exercise of judgment we posit many things as real or as being. We speak of nonliving things as well as living, nonsentient as well as sentient, nonrational as well as rational beings. Of each being or kind of being we also predicate different things as real. Of Socrates we say that he is human, white, sitting, and so on. Of human we say that it is rational, humorous, biped, and so on. In each case we assert a kind of identity, even though in each case it may not be a simple and direct identity. In fact, we seldom if ever assert a simple direct identity of anything with itself because we always suppose such an identity in any exercise of judgment. We think of a thing with its properties as one. Being not only presents itself in the act of reflection, but it presents itself as one with itself—*unum sibiipsi*. It is only through

reflection on the exercise of judgment that we come to think of this primordial unity or identity of being with itself.

What this reflection shows is that judgment, in its direct exercise, is ultimately reducible to judgment about a *this* or a *that*. Universal judgments, such as "snow is white" or "human being is mortal," presuppose judgments about *this* or *that*, taken to be snow or human. In their application to being, such universal judgments have to be brought back to some *this* or *that*. Even verification in an abstract science like physics follows this structure of judgment by bringing its conceptions back to a verification that can be observed as *this* or *that* in experience.

This or *that* thus stands as some kind of ultimate subject of predication. When I say that human being is rational animal, I do not mean that human being as such exists, but only that, where there is such a thing as human being in a *this* or a *that*, it is rational. It is Socrates or any *this* or *that* like him who is rational, and not "human being" as such. The concept "human being" only expresses what *this* or *that* is when it is a Socrates or another being like him.

By itself, however, *this* or *that* expresses little about being. It only refers to the irreducible presence of a being in actuality. Without a predicate, which expresses what it is or how it is, it is barely or only negatively intelligible. If I tell you about *this* only that it is this, you still do not know whether the real thing I am talking about is the chair or Socrates. To know the reality of *this* is to know *what* it is as well as its thisness. What makes *this* one therefore is not just its thisness but also its whatness, which may be expressed, as when I speak of *this*, or of Socrates, as a human being. Or it may be left unexpressed, as when I ignore *what* this is as I refer to it simply as *this* rather than *that*. Even when I ignore *what* a particular is in its essence, I still must think of it as having or being an essence yet to be disclosed. This is why questions for understanding arise from the experience of *this* or *that*.

Such questioning, however, presupposes some unity or identity between *what* a thing is and its thisness which is found in what Aristotle referred to as the "substance" of a thing. In its first sense, as Aristotle understood it, substance refers to a *this* or a *that*, *tode ti*, this something here, whose quiddity is to be determined. In its second sense, substance refers only to the quiddity of this something. As such it is a universal, prescinding from its thisness or haecceity. In the concrete, however, both senses of substance have to be seen as one, which gives us our first conception of a thing as one. Everything, whatever it is, is one through its substance.

In its first sense, as *this* or *that*, substance can never serve as a

predicate. It cannot even be predicated of itself in any intelligible sense. To say, "this is this," adds nothing to our understanding of *this*, except to distinguish this here from that there and to insist on its identity as distinct from *that*, which is equally left without understanding. Pure *this* or pure *that* can only serve as subject of predication, awaiting, so to speak, the intelligibility that a predicate will bring to the purely posited identity. As such it stands for the thing as it is in reality, so to speak, while the predicate expresses how the thing is understood. In its second sense, substance stands for the thing only as we understand it, so that what is expressed in the definition of a thing can be predicated of *this* or *that*, or of substance in the first sense. The act of predication can thus be seen as an expression of unity in being grounded on the way in which being is present.

Needless to say, not all predication concerns only *what* a thing is in its substance, as when I say of Socrates that he is white, or learned, or sitting, or the owner of a field, as well as or besides just being human. This illustrates how complex the unity or the identity of a being can be, something that we shall have to take into account in our elaboration of the structure of being and the order or the communication among beings. But even this kind of oblique or indirect predication, which does not refer directly to the substance of a thing, is derivative from the predication that does refer directly to the substance of things. If we can understand that the unity or the order of being encompasses more than the simple identity of a substance, it is nevertheless from the idea of a substantial identity that our conception of one begins. Without such an idea we could not conceive of many beings or of an order among them.

To think of being as one, therefore, is not just to think of one thing or another, but to think of each thing as undivided in itself or as having a simple identity of its own. Though we may not know what the identity of each thing is, we do know immediately that each thing has an identity that sets it off from any other thing. This is so much a part of the immediate evidence of being in its presencing and standing that it cannot be questioned any more than the presencing of being itself can be questioned. *Non potest quaeri quasi ignoratum, sicut nec alia principia communia* (In *Metaph* VII, 17, §1654). It cannot be questioned as if it were not known any more than other common principles can. We know from the beginning that at least one thing can be predicated of any being, namely, itself, whatever that may be. It is undivided in itself or one with itself. To say this about a being is not yet to say much about *what* or how it is, but it is to affirm its unity and identity such as it is in itself, something that cannot be denied in any knowing of a being.

5.2 Multiplicity and Dividedness

In the direct exercise of judgment, however, we do not merely affirm each being as one in itself according to a principle of identity. We also speak of many beings. Just as the division in being associated with differences leads us to deny division in any being we affirm as a thing, that is, just as we speak of it as undivided in itself, so also this undividedness of each being in itself leads us to think of multiplicity and diversity in being wherever differences seem to enter into what each being is. From division and difference we go, by way of negation of this negation, to the idea of one; and from the idea of one we go to the idea of many, one thing and another each with specific and individual differences.

Difference thus appears as a kind of limit (*Grenze*) between one being or something (*etwas*) and another, as Hegel saw in his *Logic of Dasein* (WL I, 110—16/122-29). One thing is seen as ending at the limit where the other is seen as beginning, and vice versa, so that each thing is seen as limit for the other in being. Both are therefore seen as finite in relation to one another, with each having an identity of its own, and as caught up in an infinite order of being, which is not just another thing that would be opposed to the finite things as another finite but an order that allows for many finite things in being.

With this idea of many, however, another side of the idea of unity comes to the fore. The first side is the one we have just seen: undividedness in itself. The other side is dividedness from every other. Once we come to think of being as many things, we think of each thing or being not only as undivided in itself, but also as divided from every other, or, as Hegel would say, as for itself. Thus, if we say that the first thing to be distinguished from another is a self in the presence of another self, each self is immediately seen as undivided in itself and as divided from the other. Each is understood as standing in the presence of the other in its identity but as divided or separate from the other in some kind of confrontation.

In keeping with our understanding of the human self as the primary analogue of being, this is where our primordial conception of many beings or many ones originates, along with that of identity as undividedness in oneself and dividedness from every other, in a dialectic of recognition. In this recognition of one being and another, which is a first cognition of oneself and another or of another and oneself, a difference is made between equals. In other words, the

equals are seen as many and each one is seen as reflected into itself from the other. Each is seen as standing in the face of the other.

Of course, this is not the only kind of standing that comes to be recognized in the direct exercise of judgment. We also come to distinguish different kinds of being that are nonrational, or nonsentient, or even nonliving, but that nevertheless have a standing of their own as things, as we saw in speaking of essence as a standing in being or as thing. In this we come to understand that "many" includes not only many individuals of the same kind, as if our primary analogate of being were the only kind of being, but also many different kinds of being and many individuals of the many different kinds, each with its own degree of undividedness in itself and dividedness from every other as in the analogy of being. In other words, we come to understand the oneness that is coextensive with being as itself transcendental.

5.3 Transcendentality of the One

It should be noted that we are not thinking here of the one only as understood in mathematics. The mathematical one is not the transcendental one as it derives from our first conception of being, but only the one as reduced to the category of quantity. This is the one, as Kant understood it. In its truly transcendental sense, however, the one can also be found in other categories as well, besides quantity. It can be found in the category of substance, as we have seen, where it means the identity of a thing in itself, its undividedness. It can also be found in the category of quality, where it means the similarity of a thing with itself, as Aristotle suggests (*Metaph* 1003b 37), or the being-for-self of something, as Hegel suggests (*WL* I, sect. 1, ch. 3). It is only within the category of quantity that the one is understood as the principle of discrete continuity or of number. Within that category, however, or within any category, the one is not simply convertible with being, since within each category the one specifies something according to that category, thus abstracting from other categories, and it adds a difference to our first conception of being, thus expressing it in only a special mode and not in the common mode characteristic of a transcendental property of being.

As a transcendental, the one follows more the transcendental conception of thing, adding only a negation of division to it. If we think of a thing as simple, then we think of that undividedness as simple as well. But if we think of a thing as complex or as composed of parts in any way, then we think of its undividedness as a whole, as we do, for

example, of the self, our primary analogate of thing as well as of being. Wholeness is oneness as it is found in composite things. As the self is a whole in its identity, so also is any other self in an equal way. So too is any other lesser thing that can be identified; it is a whole, but in a lesser way. Whatever we can identify as a thing we identify as a whole before we can start breaking it down into parts. To be for it is to be constituted as a whole composed of parts. What is, at least as a thing, is not only one; it is the whole whose being must be viewed as whole before any of its parts. It can even be said that the be of any composite consists in its wholeness, just as the be of any being consists in its undividedness. *Esse cuiuslibet rei consistit in indivisione* (ST I, II, I, c).

Thus, as a transcendental, one is not opposed to wholeness, as it is to many or plurality. Nor is wholeness or totality "just plurality considered as unity," as Kant maintained (KrV BIII). To be sure, wholeness can be understood as totality of things or their unity. This is part of their transcendental unity, insofar as they are not perfectly divided or isolated from one another, or insofar as together they constitute a world. But wholeness is also the wholeness of a thing or its oneness when the thing is composed of parts. A thing is not merely a simple mathematical unit. It is one as a whole with an identity of its own, undivided in itself. To think of more than one such whole, or of many, we have to think of each as a whole, as identical or undivided in itself and divided from every other. It is only after we have so distinguished between a plurality of things that we can think of wholeness as unity of a plurality. But then we are no longer thinking of wholeness as constitutive of a thing in its oneness but rather as constitutive of an order of many things somehow related to one another in a universe, a unity of many and diverse things.

At the same time, however, we also come to think of oneness or wholeness in such an order according to different degrees. At first we think of the oneness of the self as equal to itself and to that of any other self. But as we discern other things in reality that are not the equal of the self, but nevertheless things with an identity or an undividedness of their own, we think of them not only as lesser things, but also as less one, less undivided in themselves and less divided from every other. In fact, at the limit, where it is difficult for us to discern whether we still have to do with a thing as such, that is, a unity-identity-whole, say in the realm of the fundamental entities and processes of mathematical physics, it is also difficult to say whether we are dealing with something undivided in itself and divided from every other. This is the difficulty that physics itself runs into as it tries to determine what are the fundamental constituents of physical reality and finds itself torn between thinking of them as waves or as particles.

In the order of being it is no longer clear whether we can still speak of things with a standing of their own or with an identity of any sort that can be numbered or measured.

This lowest degree, of course, is not where we first come to think of being in its oneness. This level of judgment is arrived at only by a process of abstraction from the more concrete sense of being we already have with the self and its oneness. But it illustrates how oneness adheres to being or, as Parmenides put it, how being draws near only to being, even where things can no longer be clearly discerned from one another as one self can be discerned from another. At the limit, oneness seems to resolve itself into a mere continuum without wholeness of any kind, whereas in the interval between the concrete sense of being as one self and another and this abstraction of an indiscernible flow, many different kinds of wholeness are discerned in an analogy of oneness or wholeness as well as of being.

In this analogy we come to think of some things as more perfectly one than others, just as we speak of them as higher beings than others. The higher a being is, the more perfectly one or undivided it is in itself and the more perfectly divided or independent it is from every other. This is especially clear in our primary analogate of being, the self, which stands on its own better or more evidently than any other being of experience, even though it is not completely independent of every other. But it is clear also from every other kind of being that stands out in its essence as a thing, in proportion to its standing out. The better it stands out as a thing, the more undivided it is in itself and the more divided from every other. And the less it stands out, the less is it a thing undivided in itself and divided from every other, or the more divided it is in itself and the less divided it is from every other. Where we see a division among beings, we also see a unification among these same beings in a universe.

In thinking of the one as opposed to many, however, we must not think of it as simple rather than complex. The oneness of a being is not just a unit in some category or other. It is also a wholeness, which can be quite complex or made up of many units of different kinds. In the abstract, it might be tempting to think of something simple, like a basic entity in mathematical physics, as the primary instance of something one in being. But such an "entity" cannot be identified except in its relation to other entities. In its essence it is not really one in itself but part of a set. In the concrete, the set is more one than any one of its abstract entities. In fact, if we begin from our primary analogate of being in developing our conception of the one, we realize that the one can be quite complex in its wholeness. If every being is

one, or undivided in itself and divided from every other, and if human being is our primary analogate of being, then it would appear that our first conception of oneness is associated with a high degree of complexity, so that less complex beings could be understood as less one and, at the limit again, the least complex or the most simple would be understood as the least one and as occupying the lowest level of being.

In between the most complex and the least complex beings we find others in experience with different degrees of complexity that constitute different degrees of identity and oneness for different kinds of being. And though it is difficult to make absolute comparisons in being, we could state as a general principle that the more complex a thing or a being is in its identity, the more one it is likely to be and conversely, that the more one it is, the more complex it is likely to be in its being. At least for being as it presents itself in experience, the degree of oneness in a being is in inverse proportion to the degree of its simplicity.

The things we know as more perfectly one are the more complex ones, like the self, and the things we know as less perfectly one are the more simple ones, or the ones made up of less differentiated parts. It is as though the greater unity of a thing required a greater diversity and complexity of parts. Rational beings are at once more one and more diverse in their complex makeup than nonrational beings. Their complexity may make them more fragile, physically speaking, but in it is disclosed a greater identity in the order of being. Being discloses itself to the rational being. But it also discloses itself more fully in the rational being itself than in any other being of experience that we judge to be less of a being. Similarly, living things are more complex than the nonliving, but they too stand out more clearly in being than the nonliving. And so it is as we go on down the line, until we reach the point where the parts of a thing are so much like one another that it can easily be divided into two things each of which retains the identity of the original thing, like the pieces from a block of granite or the buckets drawn from a body of water. In a higher living thing such a division is impossible, not only because of the greater diversity of parts that constitute the whole, so that one cannot function without the others, but also because of the higher identity of the thing. To sever it is to lose its identity altogether and to be left with parts that take on another identity as beings in themselves, as the whole disintegrates into a plurality of more simple beings.

Whether this proportionality between higher identity and higher diversity and complexity holds for the entire order of being or only for the order of being we experience in the direct exercise of judgment

remains to be seen. It may be that this proportionality holds only for material beings, whose wholeness is constituted of parts. In any event, whether or not there are nonmaterial beings whose identity would be simple and not constituted of parts, this proportionality between higher complexity and higher identity serves to bring out further the transcendental of the one taken as a property of being in the material order of things in comparison to the mathematical one, which, as the principle of number, cannot be taken as anything but simple. Before it is reduced to the category of quantity by the understanding, the transcendental conception of the one already expresses an identity of being, an undividedness of any being in itself proportionate to *what* it is and a similarly proportionate dividedness from every other.

Finally, in connection with this transcendental of the one, we might note how the division of being is of two different kinds. First, there is the division according to species, such as that between living and nonliving beings or between rational and nonrational beings, which we characterize as higher and lower according to some order of perfection. Each species represents a certain degree of identity or wholeness in the order of being. But within each species, at least in the material order of being, there is also a further division of many individuals within the same degree of identity and wholeness. There are many individuals of one and the same species each of which is also identified as a being, undivided in itself and divided from every other. We can speak of the first kind of division as *formal division*, that is, as one yielding a *diversity* of forms, such as living and nonliving or rational and nonrational. We can speak of the second kind as *material division*, that is, as division yielding a *multiplicity* of individuals with the same specific form, such as Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle within the human species or the hundred and one Dalmatians within a species of dogs.

At the same time, however, this twofold division of being gives rise to the idea of a twofold order of being as well, a *formal order* of diverse species and a *material order* of individuals within diverse species. The two orders combine to constitute the material universe as a whole with a diversity of species of being and a plurality of individuals within the various species. How this order of the universe is constituted concretely in reality cannot be understood merely in terms of the transcendental one. It requires the conception of action and interaction as a kind of bond for this plurality of beings we call the universe. But the two sides of the transcendental one, Undividedness in itself and dividedness from every other, open the way for the conception of such an active constitution of the universe as one in diversity and multiplicity.

5.4 The Judgment of Unity

It remains for us to see how this conception of being as one is indeed found in our direct exercise of judgment in the act where being first discloses itself. We have already alluded to judgment as the positing of an identity and to the act of predication as an expression of unity grounded on the way in which being presents itself in things. This is what opened the way for us into the thought that being is one. Our question now, which is a question for critical reflection, is to see whether this thought is truly the thought of being.

If we reflect on the exercise of judgment as affirming unity in being, we can think of the affirmation as having two sides: one, that every being is undivided in itself, and the other, that every being is divided from every other. In thinking through each side one after the other, we shall find that each side contains its counterpart as it refers to being itself.

On the side of undividedness or identity, we recognize that not all judgments posit the relatively simple identity of a thing and its quidditative determinations or even its properties, which are distinct from the quiddity of a thing but cannot be separated from it, nor it from them. We posit many sorts of identity or relations between things, such as that one thing belongs to something else, as the field belongs to Socrates, or is influenced by something else, as the field is warmed by the sun. But underlying all such positing there is a more fundamental positing of things themselves in some kind of identity. At the root of all judgment there is a principle of identity that says of every thing that it is one with itself or, conversely, that it cannot not be itself. The principle of identity is at the same time a principle of noncontradiction. If being is what discloses itself in judgment and if it properly discloses itself as an identity that has to be distinguished from other identities, then we have to say that every being, every such identity, is undivided in itself.

This is immediately evident in our first conception of being itself. Parmenides saw this, except that he did not distinguish between different identities in being. It is also immediately evident in any exercise of judgment where we distinguish different things as beings in experience and understand each thing as not the other. To bring out this evidence more positively, let us turn to our more immediate experience as human beings in confrontation with one another. In this experience, which is focused on our primary analogate of being, being discloses itself as determinate or as divided between two selves, you

and me, for example, where I distinguish myself from you as undivided in myself just as you distinguish yourself from me as undivided in yourself and where we both come to the common understanding that each is an identity in itself.

This is an experience that is repeated many times with other persons and that is then extended to include other determinate beings that are not persons but that are also seen as undivided in themselves in being, albeit in less striking ways than as persons in themselves. Whatever we identify as a being we think of as undivided in itself. As we move further away from human being toward things characterized as nonrational and as nonliving, the principle of identification for each determinate being becomes more obscure, but we continue to identify things as undivided in themselves as long as some principle of identity can be found. At the limit, as we saw with regard to the fundamental entities and processes of mathematical physics, the light of any such principle all but disappears.

But this is not a loss of the immediate evidence that every being is undivided in itself. It is simply a failure to see how the principle of identity and noncontradiction applies in the case of such entities. Instead of a clear judgment about a determinate being, undivided in itself, we come rather to a suspension of judgment as to whether we are still dealing with a difference of one thing and another. This is not to say that judgments in physics have nothing to do with reality, but rather that they have to do with a reality of very diminished identity. It is not in such judgments that being discloses itself most clearly in its undividedness, but rather in judgments about one self and another confronting one another in mutual recognition.

This same immediate evidence that is available through reflection on the direct exercise of judgment can also be brought out through retort, if one tries to deny the truth of this evidence. If, for example, you try to think of being as not undivided in itself, you will have to think of it as divided. The thought of differences in being has already brought you there. But the thought of being as divided means a being and another being, or beings in the plural. Thus, in thinking of being as divided rather than undivided, you would no longer be thinking of a being in its identity, but of many beings, which brings us to the second side of the judgment of unity.

On this second side, which says that every being is divided from every other, we recognize that being discloses itself in a multiplicity and a diversity of beings. But with this recognition we also understand immediately that every being is divided from every other as the reverse side of its being undivided in itself. To think of many beings

presupposes the thought of division in being, the thought of a being, and another, and so on. Such a thought implies a limitation or a negation in being. A being other than this being means precisely a being distinct from this one, divided from it, or simply not this one. *A* is other than or is not *B*, if *B* is not *A*. Thus, as we distinguish between beings in the exercise of judgment, we necessarily think of each one as divided from every other in the same way that it is undivided in itself.

Again this is most clearly evident in the dialectic of recognition between selves and less clear in the relations between the fundamental entities of mathematical physics. In confrontation with you, where our first conception of determinate being is most in evidence, I recognize myself not only as undivided in myself but also as divided from you just as you recognize yourself not only undivided in yourself but also as divided from me. The principle of identity in each determinate being is at the same time the principle of division from other determinate beings. This is especially clear in the case of division among persons. It is also clear in the case of division among different kinds of sentient and living things. But as we approach the limit of basic physical entities, once again we find the principle of division among beings more obscure and are forced to suspend judgment as to whether such entities are properly beings divided from every other.

Evidence for this principle that every being is divided from every other being can also be brought out by retort. If you try to think of every being as not divided from every other, you necessarily think of it as undivided from every other and therefore as identical with every other, which is to say that the other is not another but rather that there is only one being, as Parmenides said. Such a thought is contrary to what is presupposed on this side of the judgment of unity, namely, that being discloses itself in some dividedness or as a multiplicity and a diversity of beings.

Thus any attempt to deny either side of the judgment of unity about things leads back into the other side and into a denial of being itself as known with its differences. It is impossible to think such an attempt through as a thought of being in its disclosing. It is, like any attempt to deny first principles of judgment, self-defeating as an act of intelligence. The only way to think the judgment of unity through as the thought of the being that discloses itself in truth is to think of every being as undivided in itself and divided from every other.

The two questions that remain with regard to the unity of being are that of the mode of its undividedness in itself, which can be

complex as well as simple, and that of the mode of its dividedness, which entails a relative independence of things in a world of interdependence. We shall deal with each of these questions further as we come to speak of the structure of being and the communication of being, respectively. But before we can do that we must reflect on the other properties of being to bring out the bond that ties beings together in their very multiplicity and diversity.

CHAPTER 6

Being as Active

We continue in our elaboration of the properties of being with active as the second, before going on to the other two usually listed after the one, namely, the true and the good. When we think of a being as one, or as undivided in itself and divided from every other, we do not think of it as closed in on itself or as purely static. We think of it as active in its identity or in its very standing as a thing. In fact, as we shall see, we discover a being as a thing with its own essential standing only through its activity, so that a being is inconceivable as a thing without some proper activity.

In saying this, however, we must be careful to understand precisely how we come to think of "active" as a transcendental property of being. We speak of something as active with reference to action or to what it does as a thing. In the concrete this action, or what a thing does, is always particular: in a particular place, at a particular time, and of a particular kind. Not only is it the action of this or that being of a particular kind, which makes it an action of a particular kind, it is also particular even with reference to the being of which it is the action. For example, when I do something, such as some physical exercise or an exercise of judgment, I not only do it at a particular time in a particular place, or as a particularly human kind of action, I also do it as only one of the particular actions I could be performing. I could also be performing some other physical exercise or exercising decision making rather than some theoretical judgment. Even things that have less freedom or no freedom at all in their self-determination have a diversity of actions that we can observe, ranging from sensation and life functions to attraction and repulsion among inanimate things. Only the simplest of entities, like atomic particles, may have only one action proper to them, but even there, insofar as it can be located in space and time, it is still thought to be the particular action of a particular thing. All things have at least one action of their own and most, especially the more complex ones, like animals and humans, have many more.

Understood as particular in this way, the term "action" does not express a common mode of being. It is not convertible with being in its transcendental conception. It expresses only a special mode of being or a difference in being, not something that can be predicated universally of being as being. Even if we think of action as a general

category containing all particular actions, it is still only a category, one of the ten supreme genera of being according to Aristotle (*Cat* chs. 4 and 9), which has to be distinguished from other categories of being such as quality, quantity, and substance, the primary category of being that expresses *what* a being is in its essence. In fact, if we think of the diversity of action in its particularities with reference to one and the same thing, we have to think of it as accidental to substance or as inhering in it or as flowing from it, rather than as part of the substance itself in its fundamental identity that persists as one at different times in different places and while exercising different activities.

How then is "active" to be thought of as a transcendental property of being if it entails a reference to something as particular as action? It can be done in the same way as we come to think metaphysically of being as common in a wide diversity of things, or as transcendental, in the exercise of judgment. In the direct exercise of judgment we refer to being as something particular, as a *this* or a *that* with some determination, as we do, for example, when we speak of this as a human being or that as a tree. In the indirect exercise of judgment we come to conceive "being" as a structured notion that entails the composition of an act with particular determinations in a singular *this* or *that*, or with what we can speak of as a concrete essence or a first substance, in the sense of Aristotle's *tode ti*, as we did earlier, for example, in our logic of being.

Action can also be conceived as a structured notion entailing a similar composition between an act and its specification, such as an act of judgment specified by its terms or an act of decision specified by the choice of a particular course over another. Even the acts of simple things such as purely physical entities are similarly specified according to the nature of the agent or the substance that produces them.

This similarity of composition in the concept, however, is not enough to satisfy the idea of complete transcendentality for action. Even as a structured notion, action remains one of the categories of being in contrast to passion and as such cannot be understood as including other categories, as the concept of being does, especially not that of substance, in relation to which action appears as something accidental. To think of "active" as something completely transcendental or as following the order of being in its transcendentality, we must think of action as following the diversity of determinate substances in being in its very relation to these substances, however "accidental" the action may be to the substance from which it flows. In other words, we must think of things themselves as acting, or as active, each according to its own way of being. Or, conversely, we must think of each way or mode of being not only as determined in an essence but *also* as giving rise to

its own proportionate way of acting. We have to say "also" here with respect to action because an action is understood as flowing from a thing or an essence already constituted with its own act of being. The act of being does not flow from the essence that limits it in a finite being. It is simply in composition with this essence, as in the case of human being, where the concrete human essence limits its act of being. Action flows from this composite of an essence and its act of being.

With this understanding of the relation between a thing and the proportionate action that flows from it, no matter how particular the action of the thing, or between an action and the thing from which it flows, we can speak of being as active in a way that is completely transcendental in the same way that we speak of one and of being itself as transcendental. Unlike the case of being as one, however, where we are adding only a negation to our first conception of being, that is, a negation of division in what is undivided in itself, in the case of action we are adding something positive to this first conception of being as one or as a thing, namely, the idea of an inclination to act on its own, though not yet the idea of any particular or special mode of action. We are adding what can be called a "property" of being as being, because we are saying that every being, whatever it is, has such an inclination to act, or is active, in its own determinate way. We are saying that it is a property of being to be active.

It can be said that this insistence on activity as a property of being over and above the three usually mentioned, namely, unity, truth, and goodness, is due to an influence of modern philosophy and what has been called the "transcendental turn to subjectivity" in this philosophy, that is, the turn to the activity of the subject as a focus for philosophical reflection. This is a turn we have already taken here in this metaphysical discourse when we articulated what we mean by "being" or how we first conceive being by reflection on the structure of the judgment we exercise in experience. It is a turn we shall continue to take in arguing from the structure of our activity to a real structure or composition in the constitution of our finite being. It is in keeping with our insistence on human being as the primary analogate of being in this reconstruction of metaphysics, as well as with some of the more ancient adages about action or the inclination to act as following from being, like *agere sequitur esse* or *unumquodque agit in quantum est actu*, meaning that "to act follows from to be" or "each being acts inasmuch as it is in act," or again like *quamlibet formam sequitur inclinatio*, meaning that from every form of being there follows an inclination to act. Such adages were spoken of transcendentially in the same way that we speak of transcendental properties of being here.

In affirming that every being is active, we are affirming what could be called a principle for all science, for it is through what a thing does that we come to know *what* it is in its essence. This is so for modern science as well as for ancient science. In speaking of being as active we are reaffirming an ancient principle for all science with regard to being in all its differences in a way that is congenial to modern critical philosophy's insistence on subjectivity, beginning with the proper activity of human being as our primary analogate. But we are doing so without departing from the ancient view by including, as part of the analogy of being and acting, the action of lesser beings as proper to these beings, including that of mere bodies or physical entities along with that of sentient and living things as well as that of rational beings.

In order to do this we shall begin by elaborating the concept of action as it comes to us from experience and how action relates to what we shall call the "underlying thing" or the thing as producing its action. Then we shall consider the two sides of action, the first as transient or as going out to other things and as affecting them, and the second as immanent or as remaining in the underlying thing that is acting and as perfecting it. From this consideration of action as two-sided we shall then go on to see how a being or a particular concrete essence comes to be thought of as a nature precisely insofar as it is the principle of its own action. Finally, before coming to the ontological understanding of action, we shall see how phenomenology views the entire life-world of the human subject as a world constituted by the action and interaction of a wide diversity of beings.

6.1 Action and the Underlying Thing

Let us begin by noting that action, like being and one, cannot be properly defined through genus and specific difference. If we take the term as a genus, "action" is among the supreme genera along with substance, quality, and quantity. It cannot be defined in terms of any higher genus. It can only be distinguished from other genera as *sui generis*. If we take the term as expressing a still broader notion than any genus, as we do here, it transcends any generic difference of being and follows being itself in its transcendentality.

In fact, what we know first about any being is its action. It is through its action that we come to know *what* a thing is. It is through different kinds of action that we come to identify different kinds of being. And it is through their action that we come to think of them as

actual, or as being in act. Even the name we use to characterize the be of a being as distinct from its essence or mode of being betrays this relation to action. We call it the "act of being," implying that to be is always to be in action, just as to be human implies to be acting as a rational animal. This is not to say that the act of being, as understood in the structure of our conception of being, is just an action that flows from the essence of a finite being. On the contrary, the act of being has to be understood as constitutive of the very being from which action flows as an accident, so to speak, or as constitutive of what the being is in its essence or substance. It is only to say that a being discloses itself through action and is known only through its action. This is true not only of other beings we know in experience, but even of our own being, which we come to know only in and through our action or what we do precisely as rational beings. Reflection on what we are begins from our direct action. As Aquinas says, even our intelligence knows itself not through its essence, but through its act of intelligence (ST I, 8, 1, c).

To think of action in its primordial sense we must go back to experience itself. Experience is action. We experience ourselves through our action, including our spiritual action of thinking and willing as well as our physical action, and we experience other selves and other things through their action, which is not always spiritual and in the case of many things is only physical. When we say that we begin from experience in our knowledge of things, we mean that we begin from their action. The world of experience is a world of interaction among selves and things in which each comes to its own standing as what it is and takes its stand according to what it determines itself to be.

If all this conception of action seems somewhat anthropomorphic, it is only because experience itself is anthropomorphic. The common or analogous notion of action itself, which is understood as spiritual in human being, can be extended to include different sorts of action that are not anthropomorphic, that is, action that is nonrational, or nonsentient, or even nonliving. Although these are lesser kinds of action, they are nevertheless specifically different kinds of action through which different kinds of being disclose themselves or are identified in their being.

Like the other analogous notions, action is known first as it is found in the primary analogate of being, the human self. It is that of which we are first conscious in ourself or in other selves. Of course, concretely this includes all sorts of activities like feeling, seeing, hearing, imagining, judging, striving, desiring, and willing, all of which entail a certain immediacy in consciousness, a certain givenness in

experience. But in keeping with our method here we should focus on the more reflective aspects of this activity, since it is in this aspect of our activity that we come to know not only *what* we are or how we stand in being, but also how being first discloses itself to us. It is in the activity of judging, as we have said from the beginning, that we come to know being as being in its presencing.

We could also add at this point that the same holds true for our activity of willing, since that too engages our self-consciousness at its highest level, in which we not only discover what we are but also determine ourselves to be what we are. It is in both activities of knowing and willing that the presencing of being has its first disclosure, both as my own being and as the being of others.

When I raise questions and seek answers, when I find answers and formulate them in concepts, when I organize these concepts in judgments, I am acting. When I entertain the possibility of different courses of action, when I deliberate about them, when I determine what I will to become, I am acting. Action begins further back in my being, so to speak, than in my intelligence and will, and it has ramifications not only in the obscure aspects of my being, but also in the world at large. But at the center of understanding and willing, action comes to a transparency in which the intelligent being knows itself as being and other beings equally as being, though not necessarily its equal in being. This is the reflective experience of being, so to speak, from which our first conception of being emerges. Without the experience or the action, the conception would not be possible, though being itself is what is first conceived.

But this kind of thoughtful action represents only a certain degree of action, and a relatively high one at that. Not all action is equally self-conscious or even conscious at all. We experience lesser kinds of action both in ourselves and in other beings. In fact, we experience action that is not conscious. Consciousness is not coterminous with action. There is action in myself that is not conscious and I do not have to suppose that every being is conscious, unless there is evidence to the contrary in its action. Conscious action is the form of action we know best and most immediately, but it is not the only form. There are lesser forms or degrees of action in what psychoanalysis speaks of as the subconscious and the unconscious or in the purely physical functions of the human body.

At the limit, there are forms of action that seem to have nothing to do whatsoever with consciousness, as in the case of nonliving things. However we may understand these forms of action, we do not have to understand them as conscious or self-conscious, though we

do come to think of them in some analogy with conscious action, our primary analogate. It is not anthropomorphism to do so, for though we begin from a conception of action centered on human being, we extend it as disclosing different kinds of originality in being, including that of nonhuman being. We do this by differentiating other kinds of action objectively, so to speak, from our own and by insisting on the originality as something positive without being conscious. Different sciences can study these actions more positively in their specificity. But it is important for metaphysics to see them in their analogy with one another and with the primary analogate.

In the direct exercise of judgment we define or identify different kinds of being according to different kinds of action. We identify human being as rational animal or *homo sapiens*, indicating in this way what human being is by what human being does or by the action that seems proper to this being. We identify brute animals in the same way, but in contrast to human being we speak of them as sentient but nonrational. So too of nonsentient living things, and finally of nonliving things. At each step we recognize an absence of a certain degree of action, but we continue on down the line as long as we can identify a positive degree of action.

As we move further away from conscious activity, we find it more difficult to identify a positive content in action, obscure and minimal as it becomes, and so we find it more difficult to define the being or to give it a positive name. We think of force or of attraction and repulsion, but we do not think of these as identifying things as well as life and consciousness do. It is to the credit of modern science that it has devised better ways of speaking of this nonliving action or interaction without resorting to animism of any kind. Thanks to its highly sophisticated use of measurement and mathematics it has penetrated more deeply into the essence of nonliving being. Yet even this knowledge of modern mathematical science is still expressed in terms of what has to be called action or a functionalism that sets down laws of action and reaction between the different entities it distinguishes.

There is a problem, of course, in seeing precisely in what sense we can speak of functions expressed in mathematical formulas as referring to action in the concrete, but that is part of the problem of verification in natural science itself. It is not precisely our problem here in metaphysics. What we can say is that the difficulty of the problem lies in the very obscurity of the abstract formulations of science as they apply to reality. When we have only mathematical formulas to help us discern various elements of reality, it is because we are dealing with only a diminished kind of action, and hence with a diminished form of

reality, and not with the full form we find in our primary analogate. In going from the one to the other we should keep clearly in mind what comes first both in the order of learning and in the degree of being

It is not the basic entities and processes of mathematical physics that come first in knowing, as physicalism claims, but human action and human being, as we have argued. There is a certain fallacy in trying to argue from what is more obscure to what is more clear in being, or from what is less known to what is more known. We could call it a fallacy of misplaced clarity as well as misplaced concretion. In our systematic articulation of being as we know it concretely, we must begin from what is better known to us in our own action, even if it cannot be reduced to exact measurement or mathematical formulation.

Along with the idea of action, however, we have also the idea of the agent or the *underlying thing* that is acting. To the extent that we think of a particular action as only accidental to a certain being or as flowing from it, we think of the thing as something posited under the action or of the action as belonging to this *suppositum*. In the words of the old adage, *actiones sunt suppositorum*: actions are actions of supposits. We shall speak of this *suppositum* as the underlying thing not to think of it as separate from its action, but rather to keep in mind that the thing is understood not by itself or apart from its action, but only as underlying its action.

To distinguish the underlying thing from its action in this way somewhat complicates the conception of action, but only by keeping the idea of thing, which follows the idea of being, present in it. Precisely how the underlying thing is to be distinguished from its action is something we shall have to work out. As in everything else for a metaphysics that takes human being as its primary analogate, this can be done more clearly through a reflection on human activity as it flows from and discloses the essence of its underlying thing, namely, human being or the concrete human essence of a Socrates.

In the diversity and the multiplicity of my actions, I come to think of myself as somehow distinct from them. Through them, through my judging and my veiling, for example, I come to know *what* I am or the kind of thing I am. As the agent or the subject in all this activity, I discover or disclose my identity as a thing. I see myself as judging and as willing and in all of this it is I who judge and will. I am the thing that underlies all these actions and in all of them I am actualizing myself. I do not know myself apart from the actions, and yet in all of them it is only as one thing that I come to know myself as agent for all of them. I distinguish myself from all of them as an underlying thing because I see them as diverse and multiple and myself as one. I judge and I will.

I also make many judgments and many decisions. And yet in all of these actions it is always I, this human being, who judges and wills.

This kind of distinguishing cannot be done as easily on the level of merely physical entities as it can be done on the level of the self or *Dasein*. But that is because of the greater obscurity of action at that lower level. Though we speak of basic entities for mathematical physics, it is much more difficult to identify them as things or to say what kind of thing they are, if in fact they are things in the proper sense of the term. If the action is difficult to define, the underlying thing is even more difficult to define, because it can only be defined through its action. At the limit, we may not know whether we are still talking about things at all or only about functions of things.

But this difficulty at the level of merely physical entities, which may or may not be actual things or bodies in the full sense of the term, serves to illustrate how closely tied our knowledge of things is to our knowledge of their action. We cannot identify things or say *what* they are apart from their action. But the converse of that is also true. We do come to identify things and say *what* they are through their action. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an unknown or an unknowable "thing in itself," as Kant was bent on supposing. Even if we do distinguish between the underlying thing and its action, we do not do so as if the underlying thing could remain hidden or undisclosed in itself. We distinguish the thing only because it discloses itself in its action. We affirm the thing as being only because it is known in action and we affirm it as known through its action.

This does not require any special intellectual intuition as of a "thing in itself," as Kant supposed for the possibility of metaphysics. All that it requires is a sense of the thing as it appears in experience through action and some reflection on the meaning we find in this disclosure. Through its action we know *what* a thing is, which is all there is to know about it, in itself as the *suppositum* of its action as well as in its relation to other things. To say that we know of a thing but that we do not know it in itself does not make sense. In saying what we know of it we are already saying that we know it in itself, even though we may not know precisely *what* it is in every respect. But we come to know what it is more precisely not by some pure intuition, but by further reflection upon its action or by closer examination of what it does. This holds true for our selves as reflective intelligent underlying things as well as for other things. And it holds true for metaphysical knowing as well as for the more "physical" knowing in the direct exercise of judgment.

In the indirect exercise of judgment that is proper to

metaphysics there is no need for some sort of intellectual intuition into a thing in itself other than the intuition already found in the direct exercise of judgment. From the beginning we have seen that metaphysics follows from experience. It begins in the reflection found in any exercise of judgment, the critical reflection that is like a clearing in which being discloses itself. The question of being moves within the circle of this disclosing. When we distinguish between an action and its underlying thing, we are not distinguishing between two separate realms of being, one phenomenal and one noumenal, and declaring only one of them knowable, that is, the phenomenal. Nor are we positing some kind of noumenal object hidden behind the phenomenal. We are distinguishing an underlying thing only to say that it is what discloses itself in its proper action. That is what it is metaphysically as well as physically and that is all there is to it metaphysically speaking. The metaphysical knowledge of things or of human subjects does not double as another kind of physics or another kind of empirical psychology, with another kind of insight into things or into the subject than the one already operative in the direct exercise of judgment. Metaphysical knowledge is the knowledge of the thing already reflected upon, but as seen in the order of being as being in its transcendentality. It is a knowledge of being as including both sides of the distinction between action and the underlying thing.

6.2 Essence as Nature

In the thought of being as active we are led to the idea of nature and to the thought of being as nature. Let us reflect on how this happens starting from our first conception of being as it is signified in the direct exercise of judgment. In our initial reflection on the logic of this conception, we were led to distinguish a twofold structure in this conception, one, a synthesis of thisness and whatness, and the other, a synthesis of this concrete synthesis with be or the act of being. We spoke of essence in two ways, as referring to *what* a thing is in the abstract sense of a definition that does not include the thisness of a thing, or as referring to the combination of whatness and thisness of a thing in its concretion. We did all this without reference to the action of a thing, relying only on how we raise questions about *what* is given in experience, namely, questions for understanding and questions for critical reflection.

In speaking of the underlying thing with reference to action, we are once again referring to *what* a thing is or to its essence. But now we are speaking of it as it relates to the action that flows from it. In

doing so we are introducing a new dimension into the order of essence, one that is usually ignored by static essentialism, but one that is strongly affirmed by existentialism. Essence, or *what* a thing is in the concrete, includes not only thisness, but also a natural inclination to act. Essence is not just a given in experience. It is something that makes itself be *what* it is. Essence is something to be achieved, something I have to make myself, for example. It is this act of achieving that is referred to as "existence." In affirming the priority of existence over essence, existentialism is affirming a certain priority of action over the merely given, at least in human being, if not in lower beings as well, but it is doing so within an order of essence as distinct from be or the act of being.

In other words, existentialism is affirming the order of essence in a new way, as something to be achieved, in opposition to a static essentialism that considers things only as given out of the past, whether by nature or by history in a human community. Existentialism is affirming essence as dynamic and, in doing so, it is, perhaps unwittingly, retrieving an ancient way of conceiving essence as nature. If it seems opposed to the priority of nature as well as of essence over existence or action, it is only because it continues to share the modern conception of nature as totally determined or as static in its givenness.

What was meant by "nature" among the ancients and what continues to be meant in the direct exercise of judgment is essence, or *what* a thing is, but viewed as a principle of action or as the principle of what we have to call its proper activity. This follows from the idea that every being is active according to its very nature. According to Aristotle, who was summing up the ancient view, "nature is the principle of a thing and the cause of moving and resting in that of which it is principle primarily according to itself and not according to some incidental factor" (*Physi* 192b 21-23). In formulating this definition, Aristotle had only a particular set of things and their natural movements in mind, namely, the order of things that come to be by nature. This set of things was understood in contrast to things that come to be by art, which for Aristotle do not have a movement of their own as artifacts in the way that the things of nature do. Aristotle's definition, however, can be seen as applying to any thing having a movement of its own by nature, including the human being, even though it transcends its nature as merely given starting from this nature as the principle or the beginning of its own activity.

Insofar as every being is thought of as active, it is thought of not only as an essence, but also as a nature according to which it acts. When we ask: "what is the nature of something?" we are not asking for anything more than what is already intended by the simple question:

"what is it?," referring to the essence of something. In saying, "what is the nature of?," we are only expressing how we expect to find the answer to the simple question: "*what?*" We are saying that we expect to find the answer through what appears to be its proper activity. *What* a thing is is known through what it does. The nature of a thing is thus only its essence viewed as the fundamental principle of its doing. As Aquinas put it in one of his first attempts to explain how we speak of essence, "the name *nature* taken in this sense [that is, as referring to essence or *what* something is] seems to signify the essence of a thing in accordance with its order or ordination to its proper operation, since no thing is without its proper operation" (*Ente l*).

Needless to say, the metaphysical idea of nature will have to be understood analogously no less than the idea of action that it underlies as principle. To the extent that we speak of action as free and self-determining in the human being, for example, we shall speak of an open nature constituted concretely through the initiative of its own action. The human being does constitute itself in what it is historically through its own action. But this is also true, analogously, of other beings that do not exercise any historical initiative but are nevertheless active in their own natural way. All beings constitute themselves concretely in *what* they are through their action, whether that action be free and self-determining or not. Action is the ultimate determination of a being in the order of essence. It is that for which each thing exists, its ultimate perfection as an already existing thing.

To think of every being as active, therefore, is to think of it as having a nature of its own from which its proper activity flows. This nature is the essence of the being considered as the principle of its activity. To be such a principle, the essence or the nature must already be constituted in its fundamental or what we can call its *first perfection* as an essence or as a mode of being. It must already have a natural form as its first perfection in being, from which action will flow as its *second perfection*. We shall have more to say about this distinction between first perfection and second perfection in being when we come to speak of being as good. For the moment, however, it is important to ask why any being must seek or achieve its own perfection through action. The reason must be found in the way being is signified according to a mode of concretion and composition.

According to this way of conceiving determinate being, essence or the mode of being is understood as limiting being or the *act* of being. We have already made the point that what we refer to as the *act* of being is not to be confused with the action of a being. The action of a being flows from *what* it is according to its essence or from its nature. It may entail a certain openness or infinity of scope in relation to what is

merely given in nature, but action, as we are thinking of it here, is not the *act* of being in composition with the essence or the natural form of the being already constituted in being. This *act* of being is understood as de facto limited by its essence in a concrete being, though as distinct from this composition with its essence it can be considered as somehow infinite in itself, or at least as entering into composition with a diversity and a plurality of other finite essences, so that its scope as an *act* is not limited to the essence of any determinate being but rather encompasses the order of all such finite beings. Through its *act* of being every finite being is in transcendental relation with other beings. However, it is in keeping with this transcendental relation that every finite being is active or has an inclination to act. Through its action it reaches out beyond its given finitude to other beings in order to find its own second perfection in communication with them. The *act* of being is like a call in every finite being to participate actively in the universe of beings through mutual interaction. To say that every being has its own activity is to say something that follows from its very ontological constitution. Action is that through which finite beings accomplish themselves according to their own nature and as a community of beings or as a universe.

At the same time, however, the action that flows from any determinate being does not cease to be the proper activity of this determinate being. As the second perfection of a finite being already constituted in its first perfection, it remains in keeping with this first perfection or with its natural form. A being acts according to *what* it is or its mode of being. What a thing does is not independent of *what* it is. This is why we can know *what* it is from what it does. Ontologically speaking, the second act is in some sense determined by the first act, even though it comes as its second perfection.

The inclination to act follows the form of the first act, whether that inclination be natural or intentional. In the case of an intentional inclination, the action follows upon an intentional form or one conceived through thought.

In the case of a natural inclination, it follows upon the natural form of the thing or the form of the thing existing independently of any thought of our own. This is how we come to know the nature of a thing through how it acts on its own, just as we come to know our intellectual nature through how we act on our own.

The lower we go in the scale of material beings, the more we think of form as absorbed in matter, the less form overcomes matter and the less it is a principle of action by itself, the more its action is only a reaction proceeding from an external form as well as from its

inner form. Conversely, the higher we rise in the scale of material being or the more form overcomes the density of matter through knowing, for example, the less it is merely reaction and the more it is properly original action as we understand it in properly human activity. It is a certain regularity of action and reaction at different levels that leads us to think of the underlying things as having a certain determinacy in their nature that is open to perfection through action.

6.3 Phenomenology of Action

In our elaboration of the notion of action and its underlying thing and of being as nature thus far we have proceeded in a way that could be characterized as phenomenological. We have been saying what we mean by action and how that relates to being. The point we have been driving at, however, is the ontological turn in which action is seen not only as that in which being discloses itself, whether in ourselves or in other beings, but also as what follows from being itself in its disclosing. To make the point of this ontological turn more clear, let us review some of the significant aspects of action as we experience it and show phenomenologically how the ontological turn presents itself in this experience.

We begin from the fact of the universe as we experience it or from what has been called the *Lebenswelt*. This fact entails a certain polarity between consciousness and world or what we might refer to as an existential aspect and a cosmic aspect. Phenomenologically, we can begin from the existential center in a kind of fundamental ontology, as Heidegger calls it, where the action of *Dasein* is paramount. This action can be seen as only transitive or external to the self, as having to do only with things as given at hand in instrumental fashion, and as constituting only a world of instruments to be used in the pursuit of particular projects. Or action can be viewed as more immanent and internal to the self, as more thoughtful and willful, and as perfecting the self in its relation to the world. It is through this two-sided action, or experience as a whole, that being discloses itself to or in knowing.

Knowing, we say, is of being. But knowing begins as or in experience. Knowing is itself an action, but one that is intelligent. It is conscious not only of an object, but also of itself as real. It is self-consciousness as well as consciousness of an object. And it is through this reflection of self-consciousness that it becomes conscious not only of being, but also of being as being, at the same time as it thinks of being as something to be actualized. As an action, knowing is

complemented by willing, both as the will to know and as the will to the fulfillment of being, which may coincide as one in the self-conscious being but which may also be kept apart in the transitivity of instrumental action.

All this about the existential center of experience is being said too quickly and would require much longer reflection to sort out. A proper existential analysis of *Dasein* would require much more thought than we can give it here. But that should not deter us from the task before us, which is to understand how this action relates to being as being.

As we have already said several times, we know the action first as real or as being. What is first for us in learning is action, whether it be our own or that of another, in the interaction, say, of mutual recognition between selves. But as we distinguish some underlying thing from action itself, whether it be our self or an other, we also come to understand that we know what that thing is through its action. We have no immediate intuition of what we or what other beings are. We have only a reflective understanding of being. We start from a second act, so to speak, and we are drawn into the first act of a thing, what we speak of as its natural form. Through our own action of understanding, we come to know, at the same time as we actualize it, the nature of understanding and hence the nature of our being as rational. Through our action of willing as well, we come to know, at the same time as we actualize it, the nature of willing and hence again the nature of our being as willful. Similarly, through the understanding and willing of others we come to know *what* they are as underlying things as well as what they make themselves to be.

Understanding and willing, however, are only the highest forms of activity we know directly in experience. They are not the only forms. There are also lesser forms, which we shall conceive in some analogy with understanding and willing, as the Greeks did, for example, in speaking of causality. The Greek term for cause, *aitia*, was originally taken from a legal context, where it meant a charge, an accusation, or an imputation. In that original context "cause" implied some kind of responsibility, which presupposes understanding and willing along with intelligence and deliberation. In lesser kinds of action where there was still some evidence of a thing initiating something of its own in being, which is the basis for imputing an action to a thing even when there is no evidence of understanding and willing on the part of the thing, the idea of causation was retained, though without any presupposition of intelligence and deliberation, as we continue to do in scientific discourse when we speak of a mere thing causing something to happen. In all of this we are extending our original idea of action

wherever we can find enough initiative to warrant speaking of an underlying thing.

This extension, however, takes us into the more cosmic aspect of our experience as distinct from its existential aspect. The idea of being as active is relatively easy to conceive in relation to *Dasein* or the human self. I know myself only through my action and I know others only through their action. If I think of higher beings than the human being, I shall have to think of such beings as even more active in their intelligence and will. But what of the lesser beings of experience that seem to have little or no activity or initiative of their own? How are we to understand the proper activity of such things?

To answer this question is not precisely the task of metaphysics. It is more the task of the particular sciences in their specific concern with these lesser things or of the phenomenology of the life-world. But it is the task of metaphysics to show that, whatever there is at the limit, it is active. To say such a thing is to express a judgment that brings a set of terms together in some *a priori* fashion, for we come to know being as an underlying thing only through its action. But one way in which we come to this idea *a posteriori* or phenomenologically is through the observation of a certain regularity in action that enables us to identify different underlying things or natures on the basis of regular differences and to identify different relations of causation between different things through induction. This is how we come to the concept of an order of nature where there is action and interaction but no evidence of intelligence and will on the part of the underlying things. A phenomenology of science itself, as well as of the *Lebenswelt*, would bring this out by restoring the idea of nature in its pristine meaning, as referring to that order of things, which, according to Aristotle, happen always or most of the time—an order with exceptions, to be sure, but where things are still seen as acting according to their nature and identified as such by reason of their constancy or regularity in the moving diversity of the experienced world.

6.4 Ontology of Action

This brings us to the ontological turn in our reflection on action. How do we come to understand being in its most radical sense as active? Or how do we come to understand action as flowing necessarily from being in such a way that we have to say that every being is active?

To answer this question metaphysically we must reflect upon our most immanent activity, that of judging and willing, where we come to think not only of being as being, but also of being as active or as act that actualizes itself. How do we discover being or how does being disclose itself in its most radical sense in our exercise of judging and willing? We discover it in ourselves thanks to the act by which we coincide with ourselves. We discover ourselves as being in this activity and we discover being itself as this active identity in ourselves. We discover both at the same time, being and ourselves, in this activity that is most ours and yet that is a response to being as well as a disclosure of being.

Upon reflection I think of this activity as both mine and real. It is for me what is most real, and yet it is real only on the condition that it is mine. At the same time, however, I think of it as mine only insofar as it is real, or only insofar as it is. Though I make myself be in this immanent activity, I still find myself only participating in being. I discover this priority of being over me, so to speak, in the very act in which I discover the originality of my own being or in which what is can only be what makes itself be. Heidegger writes that *Dasein* "understands itself always out of its existence [*Existenz*]" (SZ 17/33), which he speaks of as "a possibility of itself to be itself or not to be itself," but which we can understand more concretely as action, or as *Handlung*, in which there is the possibility of making oneself one thing or another.

In other words, human being comes to know itself through its action. Because this action is free and self-determined, the essential determination of this being cannot be given as the *what* of a mere thing (*ein sachhaltiges Was*). "Its essence lies much more in that it has always to be its be as its own," which is why Heidegger says the name *Dasein* as pure expression of be (*Seinsausdruck*) has been chosen to designate this being (SZ 16-17/ 32—33). In this Heidegger is insisting on how being discloses itself in human being through human being's own action, which can only be as this being's own and which brings it to perfection according to *what* it is. But this cannot be understood only with reference to the be of this being.

Speaking of action, or of *Handlung*, Heidegger writes "bringing to perfection [*Vollbringen*] means to unfold something [*etwas*] into the fullness of its essence [*Wesen*], to lead it forth into this, *producere*. Therefore what already is is perfectible [*Vollbringbar*]" (Heidegger 1946, 313/193). So far, this is in keeping with what we have said of action as perfecting a being according to its essence. Unfortunately, however, Heidegger goes on immediately to confuse the issue by speaking of "is" in "what already is" as referring to be, or to the act of

being, rather than to the essence to which he has already referred: "what 'is' above all is be [*das Sein*]" (*Hum* 313/193). This can only be construed as either reducing be to an essence in our conception of being or as treating be as if it were only an action in the order of essence, neither of which is acceptable in a proper conception of being as active.

In the composition of a determinate being, be, or the act of being, should be kept clearly distinct from its essence or what we are now referring to as the underlying thing. As such this act is not an action, but the actuality of the thing as given in experience. To be sure, this act can be conceived as a perfection of the essence it actualizes, which otherwise would have to be thought of only as possible. But action is not the perfection of an essence or of the underlying thing in the same sense as that. As the proper activity of an essence, action is a perfection only in the order of an essence as determinate. Action is an ultimate act for the finite being only in the order of the finite essence or of the underlying thing as proper to its nature. Be as the act of being is in composition with this entire order of essence as a whole, including action as its second or ultimate perfection. Even as distinct from its act of being, this order is quite dynamic, since every finite being is understood only as active and known only through its action. But action is only a part of this order as the proper activity of a determinate being, whereas be or the act of being has to be conceived as common and as distinct from the entire order of essence though ontologically in composition with it.

In terms of human being, this means that we can understand human action only as perfecting the human essence as the underlying thing. Without this concept of underlying thing, we cannot properly understand how action brings a being to its perfection. The act of being, on the other hand, or as distinct from its essence in the underlying thing, cannot be understood as the underlying thing, as Heidegger would seem to suggest. It is an act first appropriated by the underlying thing in its essence or its standing as a mode of being, and then further appropriated through the self-perfecting action of that same essence or *Dasein*. We cannot take *Dasein* as a pure expression of be, but rather as an expression of human being as a whole. *Dasein* has ontological meaning only in that it refers to human being as having its own immanent activity, which brings it to perfection in the order of its essence. Such a being still entails a composition between what is mine and what is real in what I am and what I still have to make myself be. I discover my being as being in this active identity.

I do not, of course, discover only my own being in this sort of

self-perfecting activity. I also discover the being of others through their activity, which is immanent to them but external to me. Other selves discover their being in the same way as I do, through their immanent activity or as an active identity as well. But I cannot discover their being in the same way as I discover mine, through my own immanent activity. Nor can they discover my being in the same way as they discover theirs, through their own immanent activity. But in mutual recognition there is a certain communication in this immanent activity of selves. The ontological point to be made, however, is that each self is itself in a privileged position for the disclosure of being. It is, as we have said, the primary analogate of being. And it is that primarily as an active identity through the exercise of thought and will in relation to other active identities exercising thought and will.

When the actual exercise of this identity is suspended, thought and will disappear in us. They are no longer conscious in what we can call their "second act." But they remain in what we can call their "first act," that is, in the act that made their actual exercise possible in the first place. We speak of this as an act in the underlying thing, however, and not just as a possibility to be oneself or not to be oneself. If this first act of active identity were to disappear, it is our very being that would disappear. We would no longer be or would cease to be because we would be without any active identity. This is why being has to be thought of as fundamentally active, even where it appears to be inactive or passive.

This reflection into the first act of active identity brings out the identity of the self as underlying thing. I am directly conscious of myself as being only in the actual exercise of thought and will. But in the same exercise of active identity I am also indirectly conscious of being there (*Sein da*) as a *this* with a nature or a quiddity, or as a thing with an active identity. I do not know myself as a thing except as active identity and, to the extent that I am for myself the primary analogate of thinghood, I do not know of any other thing except as active identity. Whether that other thing can be conscious or not in its active identity, as I am, I can think of it as being only in an activity that discloses it to me. This is how being presences itself as a standing and how I come to know what different things are in their first act, namely, in their nature or essence, through the actual exercise of activity, my own as well as that of other things. No underlying thing, precisely as underlying thing, can be without its proper activity.

If this ontology of action is to include all things, the nonliving as well as the living, or the basic entities and processes of mathematical physics as well as the self, it must extend its understanding of active identity to include action without consciousness as well as with

consciousness. It is easy enough to include living things in this extending, for life surely appears as an active identity. But how are nonliving things active and in what does their thing-hood consist?

This brings us back to the question of how far we can go in speaking of entities as active and therefore as identifiable things, a question that perhaps can never be completely settled but that could only be settled in an ontology of the particular sciences. The only thing we can say here in a more common ontology of action is that nonliving things, insofar as they are things, are active at least in the sense that they make themselves known to us. Kant saw this when he was forced to think of things in themselves as causing sense impression. We know them, or at least *of* them, because they act on the passivity of our senses. Without this supposition, Kant could not justify any objective knowledge, since without sense impression the categories of understanding remain empty with regard to ourselves as well as to other things. What Kant failed to see, however, is that there cannot be two things in experience, one phenomenal and one noumenal. There is only one underlying thing known for what it is in its first perfection through its proper activity. What he did see, nevertheless, was that every thing displays some activity in making itself known as well as in its interaction with other things in the world. In this he was quite right, for in the exercise of judgment, in our claims to be expressing the truth of being, we do not think of ourselves as acting arbitrarily, but as responding to being itself presencing itself as active and disclosing *what* it is through this activity. There is no way of thinking the being of anything except as active on us as well as in itself. If there is a gap to be bridged between knowing and being, as there seems to be when we begin to raise questions, we find the gap already bridged through action which discloses each thing according to *what* it is in its first act or its essence.

CHAPTER 7

Being as True

It remains for us to bring out the other two transcendental properties of being, the true and the good, in order to complete the thought of being in its transcendental. With the thought of being as one and as active we already have a certain opening of being into multiplicity and diversity. We have the thought of something and an other (*Etwas und ein Anderes*), as Hegel put it (*WL* 104/117), or simply of something (*aliquid*), as Aquinas put it, since some-thing refers to a thing that is other (*aliud quid; Ver I, I, c*). We think of some thing always as a thing among others.

If a being is not perfectly simple in its identity, not perfectly undivided in itself, it is also not perfectly divided from every other being; it is somehow one with other beings. The idea of transcendental unity thus not only opens the way to a certain multiplicity and diversity in being; it also implies a certain unification and interdependence in this multiplicity and diversity, a unification that takes place through action and interaction. We do not think of beings as merely standing apart from one another in *what* they are. We also think of them as coming together in a universe, as a unity of many and diverse beings. Being, thus, as multiple and diverse, takes the form of a world of beings in which a center appears as bringing things together. It is in the attempt to think through this concentration of being that the thought of truth and the thought of goodness appear as properties of being, for it is with reference to a thoughtful and a willful being that being itself is thought of as true and good. But how is this thought of the transcendental of being to be brought to completion through truth and goodness and with reference to what is thoughtful and willful being?

To think of truth and goodness as properties of being does present some difficulty. Does not truth refer more to intelligence and good to appetite than to being itself? A being, as that which is known, is thought of as in itself. As such, a being can immediately be thought of as one, undivided in itself and divided from every other, and as active or interactive with other beings. But can any being be thought of as true and good in the same way, that is, without reference to anything more than being itself? When we say that the thought of truth and the thought of goodness imply some reference to intelligence and appetite, are we not adding something that has to be construed as a

difference of being rather than as a property of being? If so, can truth and goodness still be thought of as properties of being, as the ancients thought of them, or do they have to be relegated to some kind of being, thus allowing for some beings to be true and good and other beings to be false and evil?

This is a problem that ancient Pythagoreanism had struggled with. The solution it came up with was to split being into two orders, one good and one bad, and to posit a separate first principle for each order, one good and one bad, a solution that was later adopted and transposed into biblical terms by Manicheanism. But such a dualism of orders and of principles cannot be reconciled with the transcendental unity of being, which implies that there can only be one being or one order of being and that all being is ultimately reducible to one principle. Nor is it reconcilable with the idea that truth and goodness are properties of being, since it would imply an order of beings that are neither true nor good. If truth and goodness are to be understood as properties of being, then being itself or every being precisely as being must be understood as true and good.

But if truth and goodness can be understood only with reference to intelligence and appetite, how, then, can we understand them as properties of being itself? We can do so only by supposing that there is some being with intelligence and will that relates to all being or to which all being relates precisely as being. In an onto-theological framework it would seem that this can be done fairly easily through the notion of creation. Being is understood as created and creation is understood as flowing through intelligence and will. Thus every being is understood as related to the intelligence and will of the Creator. It is true insofar as it relates to the creative intelligence and good insofar as it relates to the creative will. Hegel thinks of creation in this way when he refers to the realm of Logic as "the truth as it is in and for itself without veil" and to its content as "the exposition of God as He is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit" (*WL I* 31/50), as do other more traditional onto-theologians who are equally presumptuous in assuming for themselves God's viewpoint as the sole principle of being and as something given from the beginning in the thinking of being.

Whether God can be understood as sole principle of being, or even whether there is such a sole principle of being to be thought, remains to be seen. For the moment we can only say that being cannot be thought of metaphysically as flowing from any sort of creation here. In the beginning metaphysics can only take being as it presents itself and think it through to its properties as we first come to understand it. Before we can even approach the thought of creation

through intelligence and will, as we shall find in raising the question of a summit of being, we must already have understood being in its truth and goodness. We are not in a position to adopt the viewpoint of a creator *ex nihilo sui et subjecti*, whatever that might be. We can only accept being in knowing, not create it. The only way we can come to a metaphysical understanding of being as true and as good is from the standpoint of our own intelligence and will. That is the pivot around which our initial thought of being takes place and it is pivot enough for coming to understand being as true and good.

We have already seen how human being is for us the primary analogue of being. It is from human being and in relation to human being that we come to understand all of being. But this selfsame human being is not just a being closed in upon itself. It is a being open to all of being. Recapitulating what others had said before him, Aristotle wrote that the human soul is somehow everything that is, since to know something, whether sensibly or intelligibly, is somehow to be what is known, not in the sense that the known itself is in the knowing, but in the sense that its species is in the knowing, for it is not the stone itself that is in our knowing when we know the stone, but its species [*Soul* 431b18-30]. Taking this thought of Aristotle and the ancients one step further, Aquinas finds in the human soul the ground for all being coming together and for thinking of being as true and good.

We have seen how he thought of the transcendentals as conceptions expressing common modes of being that follow being as being in its transcendentality. One is such a conception. But one follows every being as it is in itself. Are there not properties that follow every being in the order of one being to another? It is in such an order that we think of being as some thing, that is, as one thing other than another or as divided from others. But this order of one thing to another or of beings to one another can also be thought of more positively as a *coming together* (*convenientia*) of one being with another or of all beings with one another. Action and interaction can be understood as constituting such a coming together in a universe of being. But this coming together presupposes something whose nature it is to come together with every being—*aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omni ente*, which, Aquinas says, is the human soul as understood by Aristotle, that is, the soul as somehow everything: *quodammodo omnia* (*Ver I, I, c*). According to Aquinas, then, it is through the human soul, which is at once sentient and intelligent, that we first come to think of all being as coming together; and it is through the same soul that we come to think of being as both true and good, since the human soul is open actively to being as both cognitive and

appetitive. The conception of truth as a property of being thus expresses the *coming together* of being with intelligence or knowing, while the conception of good as a property of being expresses the *coming together* of being with appetite or willing.

This coming together of being with intelligence and will cannot, however, be thought of as purely incidental or external to being. It follows necessarily from our very conception of being as we try to express it more completely. Being is not something we think of as closed up within itself apart from all disclosure. On the contrary, we think of it only as disclosing itself in our knowing as that which is. When we think of being as true, it is of being itself that we think and not just of being as relating to our knowing. For without being there is no knowing. The truth of knowing has to be in being itself, since otherwise knowing would not be what it is, that is, knowing of being. Nor do we think of being only as disclosing and true, but also as appealing and good, that is, as an object of appetite, something to be striven for or acquiesced in. Being discloses itself as the most fundamental good, as that which is willed ultimately, whether in ourselves or in any other being.

Human being is thus the being that gathers all being together. It is the opening or the clearing in which being discloses itself as that which is willed ultimately, and it is by reason of our finding being in this opening that we necessarily come to conceive it as true and good. It is impossible to think of something as being without at the same time thinking of it as true or know-able, even if we do not actually know it. As knowable, however, it is also thought of as appetible, either precisely as something that satisfies the desire to know or as something that calls for a further response consequent on knowing. Being enters into this circle of intelligence and appetite precisely as being, so that the conception of true, which expresses a relation to intelligence, and the conception of good, which expresses a relation to appetite, both follow necessarily from our first conception of being in its transcendental analogy.

To say this, however, is not to think of being only in relation to human intelligence and appetite, which are finite or determinate in their mode of grasping. On the contrary, it is to think of being in its transcendental openness, even to the point of infinity, and it is to open human intelligence and appetite to this transcendental order, rather than to reduce being to only one of its determinate forms. Though being is thought of as gathered together through our intelligence and appetite, so that it has to be spoken of as true and good, it is not thought of as reducible to this particular gathering in the concrete exercise of our intelligence and will. Rather the gathering itself of being

as true and good is thought of as a reaching out to being itself, which appears as that which stirs questioning of intelligence and appetite of will. It is being that gathers as it is being gathered by human being. This is why we speak of the true and the good as properties of being, and not just as objects of human faculties.

Though we think of true and good with reference to our intelligence and will, we do not think of them only with reference to what is given at hand in this intelligence and will. We think rather of intelligence as relating to the truth of being and of appetite as relating to the goodness of being. We experience intelligence as questioning only insofar as we experience being as transcending the understanding at hand and we experience will as desire only insofar as we experience being as transcending what we already hold and have to acquiesce in. In either case it is an infinitude of being that takes our intelligence and appetite beyond the finitude of what is at hand for them.

The thought of being as true and as good thus recenters metaphysics on the human being, as the thought of analogy did, only now it is to open up this being to the full scope of its intelligence and appetite, which is the scope of being itself in its fullness. The human being is the one who brings being as being into the open. It is the only being that can raise the question of being metaphysically. But it does so only in the pursuit of being and in the knowledge that being is the intelligible even before it is intelligized and the appetible even before it is desired. It is this foreknowledge of being as true and as good that we must now enter into, to see not only how it follows from experience, as metaphysics itself does, but also how it begins *a priori* in the reflection proper to the exercise of judgment and decision.

We begin with the understanding of being as true because the understanding of being as good presupposes the understanding of being as true, just as human willing or appetite presupposes human intelligence. In the end, however, we shall find that the good can also enjoy a certain priority over the true in their mutual inclusion of one another as properties of being. For even as true, being is a good that satisfies the desire to know, and as good, it comes under the requirement of truth.

7.1 The Essence of Truth

Just as being, one, and action cannot be properly defined in terms of genus and specific difference, since they are first notions through

which other notions can be defined, so also truth cannot be properly defined in terms of genus and specific difference. It too is a first notion that we come to understand in our exercise of judgment and through reflection on this act. In fact, we have already encountered this notion of truth in our reflection on the structure of judgment, which always entails a truth claim, and we have been using it from the very beginning in recognizing that knowing is of being and that being is what is known. Already in this initial reflection on the hermeneutic circle of knowing and being in the exercise of judgment we were implying a conception of truth.

In his reflection on the original meaning of truth as expressed in the Greek term *aletheia*, Heidegger focuses on it as the disclosedness or unhiddenness of being. To say that a statement is true is to say that it discloses being in itself. It expresses or lets being be seen in its disclosedness. Phenomenologically speaking, this understanding of truth presupposes for Heidegger, as it did for Aristotle and Aquinas, a certain be-in-the-world (*In-der- Welt-sein*) on the part of *Dasein* or human being, which, in its care, relates to being in the world (*innerweltliches Seiende*) and through this openness attains the phenomenon of truth in its most original sense (SZ §44; 282-99/256-73).

The essence of truth understood in this way consists, then, not so much in some kind of agreement between a statement and the thing it is about, but rather in a kind of relating (*Verhalten*) that stands in the open and adheres to something open as something open. "What is thus opened up, and solely in this strong sense, was experienced early in Western thinking as 'what is present' [*das Anwesende*] and for a long time has been named 'being' [*das Seiende*]" (WW 184/124). What is present is what makes itself known and what makes itself known is being. In this relating, which is truth, being is understood as that which makes itself known.

But is it really being (*to on*) that the conception of truth expresses or is it rather the be of being (*to einai tou ontos*), as Heidegger would seem to prefer? "There is [*es gibt*] only be [*Sein*]," he writes, "—not being [*Seiende*]—insofar as truth is. And truth is only insofar and as long as *Dasein* is. Be and truth 'are' in an equally original sense" (SZ 304/272). But a question arises for Heidegger here, as it does for us: What does it mean to say that be "is" where be has to be distinguished from every being? The question can be raised concretely, Heidegger adds, "only if the meaning of be and the broad scope of the understanding of be in general has been clarified. "This itself presupposes an understanding of be in its ontological difference from being, a difference that is not given in the question of being as we

understand it here and the meaning of which we have yet to explore as something in being itself rather than just in our conception of being. How that ontological difference will affect our understanding of the truth of being remains to be seen in an exploration of the structure of being that the difference implies. For the moment it is enough to say, as has long been said, that the conception of truth does express being—not be—in a common way or as being in its relating to knowing, just as knowing in truth is of being.

This essential relating of truth has been conventionally described in terms of an agreement or a correspondence between understanding and reality or an adequation of intelligence and thing—*adaequatio intellectus et rei*. But we must not be misled by such a description. It is not a correspondence such as there might be between two things that are identical to one another, such as two coins or twins. It is a correspondence between an act of knowing and that which is known in that act. When I recognize a piece of earth for what it is, that is, knowingly and in truth, I do not become that piece of earth. I assert it in its reality according to what I know of it in the opening where I represent it conceptually. Nor do I assert it only in its representation, that is, as I conceive it or as it is in my mind, as I might if knowing consisted only in the first act of intelligence, which is to form a quiddity of things in one's mind. I also assert it in its reality, as I do in the second act of intelligence which comes only after the first act of intelligence or in conjunction with the quiddity formed in it, through critical reflection, as an act of "composing," when I say yes to what I have represented for myself in that quiddity, or of "dividing," when I have to say no to the representation.

Any conception of truth that fails to take into account this complex structure of judgment will inevitably miss the point of the conventional description of truth as correspondence or adequation. For when it is said that truth is found only in judgment, it is not meant that truth consists only in the bare yes or no of assertion or negation found in the second act of intelligence, but in a yes or no always determined by a representation in the first act of intelligence integral to the total act. Assertion or negation, the *is* or *is not* of judgment, rides on *what* is expressed in the terms 5 and P. Thus, in the metaphor of correspondence or adequation, truth remains an essential relating to being through the opening of understanding to being as present in critical or reflective intelligence.

7.2 The Truth of Essence

Relating, however, takes place in some kind of an opening between two terms. In truth this relating takes place between two sides, a subject and an object or an intelligence and a thing, whatever the thing may be. In our phenomenological approach to the conception of truth, we come at it from the side of the subject or intelligence. Truth, we say, expresses a relating in being to intelligence. The relating presupposes an intelligence that, in its care, actively relates to being or is somehow everything. When we speak of truth in its essence we speak of it only as a relating, without giving any priority to either side of the relating. The ancients referred to this as the *ratio veritatis*, the idea of truth in general as a coming together of two: intelligence and thing. But we can also speak of truth from the side of the object or the thing in the relating. Thus, if we speak of truth viewed from the side of the subject or intelligence as *logical or formal truth*, we can also speak of truth viewed from the side of the object or the thing as *ontological or material truth*.

These are all expressions that have been used to get at the various facets of truth in its essential relating. What sense are we to make of them? Are they all equally valid or valid in the same way? Can any one of them be understood independently of the relating or the *coming together* that is the essence of truth? What does it mean to distinguish ontological truth from logical truth, or material truth from formal truth? Can there be ontological truth without logical truth, or material truth without formal truth?

The idea of material truth, to begin with, should not be taken as referring to matter as such, as if truth could be found only in material things. In the context of Kantian critical thinking, "matter" refers more to the content of knowledge as distinct from its "form." Without content the categories of understanding are purely formal or empty and, since for Kant content comes only through sense intuition, there is no truth without some material component or sense manifold. On the other hand, since there is no knowing without the categories of understanding through which we represent things given in the manifold of sense intuition, there is also no truth without some formal act of understanding. Thus, in the Kantian perspective, the ideas of formal and material truth can only complement one another in a total act of knowing. Though the idea of content is not *per se* restricted to something material or sensible, since Kant allows for such a thing as an intellectual intuition that would have a purely intellectual content, it is in fact restricted to the material and sensible in human knowing, since Kant does not allow for any such intellectual intuition in human being, apart from sense intuition.

But the idea of material truth in the sense of a content of

knowledge is not necessarily limited to that of a material thing in this way. Whether one wants to put it in terms of an intellectual intuition as such or not, one can still speak of a content of knowledge prior to sense intuition, as Hegel does in his *Logic*. In German such a content can still be referred to as *Sache*, a subject matter that does not have to be taken as a thing (*Ding*). Even if it is understood as distinct from the form of the act in which it appears, however, this content is still not reducible to something material. This is why Hegel can claim to develop his *Logic* as an articulation of truth, that is, a knowledge with content, prior to any "creation" of nature or finite spirit, that is, independently of any reference to matter. In English we have some difficulty in following Hegel's move because we tend to think of *Sache* as subject matter or simply as the matter of a consideration. The use of the term "matter" in this way can be misleading, however, since the matter at issue is not strictly matter as such, but rather a subject of consideration, that is, of an act of intelligence able to consider an immaterial as well as a material subject. When we were speaking of being as the subject matter of metaphysics at the beginning, for example, we were not excluding matter from its content but neither were we restricting this content to material being as such. We were beginning to consider being simply as being, which includes a formal as well as a material content. In taking only be for his subject of consideration, Heidegger may have been simply falling back into the Hegelian move of trying to develop the concept of pure be without any reference to being present as present in experience or as grasped in the first act of intelligence.

Such a move results in an unwarranted restriction of the conception of being and truth to the given finitude of human understanding that is common among Heideggerians. But it could also be conceived as a move from the idea of material truth to a more common idea of ontological truth, although the move does present some difficulty for a proper conception of truth. Traditionally the idea of ontological truth had been opposed to the idea of merely logical truth. Kant understood this opposition as leaving the *Ding an sich* beyond the reach of human knowledge in the absence of any other intuition than sense intuition. In restoring a unity of form and content in pure knowing apart from sense intuition, however, Hegel seems to have only collapsed ontological truth into logical truth or, perhaps more exactly, to have expanded the idea of logical truth so that it includes or absorbs ontological truth.

What is to be made of this collapse or this expansion? Is it truly an expansion of logic into ontology, if the *Logic* begins only with pure be (*das reine Sein*), which is then understood as pure nothing (*das*

reine Nichts)? Or is it more a collapse of the two sides of an opening that should remain open? How is this relation between ontological and logical truth to be understood without collapsing the ontological into the logical?

The question brings us back to the idea of truth as a relating in an opening. What is doing the opening, so to speak, and what is being opened up? Human understanding can be seen as that which opens up and being can be seen as that which is opened. In accordance with this, logical truth can then be seen as truth on the side of human understanding, and ontological truth as truth on the side of being, as if the two sides of truth could be separated from one another. But truth is not a separating. It is a relating of two sides that cannot be understood in separation from one another. It expresses an identity between the knowing and the known. Hence logical truth and ontological truth cannot be understood as opposed to one another. They can only be understood as mutually including one another from either side of the opening in which truth appears, or rather in which being appears in truth, for it is being which makes itself known as truth. Logical truth makes sense only in relation to ontological truth and ontological truth makes sense only in relation to logical truth in this opening.

But does not this opening still imply some kind of opposition between the two sides of the opening? Would there be an opening without two sides that are somehow opposed to one another? Perhaps, but the opposition should not be thought of as one between ontological and logical truth. The idea of truth implies that the opposition has already been overcome in a relating. How else, then, can the opposition be thought? In modern philosophy it has come to be thought of in terms of an opposition between object and subject. Truth is spoken of as objectivity, and subjectivity or subjectivism is seen as a cause of untruth. The problem of truth is seen as one of overcoming one's subjectivity and entering into objectivity, as if truth itself were a thing that can be found only in objects.

This notion of objectivity in truth is, of course, very important for the essence of truth as relating. To speak of an opening is to speak of a distance between two sides. An object is that which stands over against (*Gegenstand*) a subject and the distance that separates them is that which has to be crossed by the subject desirous of knowing and thereby appropriating the object. In fact the object as conceived is what determines the form of consciousness in the subject, as Hegel shows when he distinguishes different forms of consciousness from one another in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. This object, however, whether clearly conceived or not, exists only for a subject, which is a subject only as open to the object.

The term "subject" is not used here in the same way as we were using it earlier in speaking of a subject of consideration in a science. Here "subject" refers more to a thing, rather than to a way of considering things, albeit a thing with special characteristics. It is the thing that can be known immediately through the act of thinking, as Descartes thought, or the thing that still cannot be known *an sich* for lack of any intellectual intuition, as Kant thought. As such a thing, the subject can be thought of as an object, a *res cog-itans*, and can become an object of investigation and appropriation. But it is not as such an object that it enters the opening of truth. The subject in the essential relating of truth is rather the opening itself as representing that which presents itself or takes its stand in being. As such, the subject is in quest of being as that which is to be attained, its objective, so to speak, and it recognizes being as that which is opened up in objects, including itself as an object or as a thing.

Thus, in the essential relating of truth, objects are not seen as closed in upon themselves, but as disclosing what is essential about being in the sense that "thing" expresses *what* a being is or its essence. The object appears as distant from the subject only insofar as this essence or standing in being has yet to disclose itself fully or to be fully appropriated. But this distance is overcome in the act of knowing where objectivity is attained, that is, where what presents itself is represented adequately. If human intelligence were not in quest, we would not have to think of truth as objective or having to be objective. We would think of it only as intellectual acquiescence in being itself as known in judgment.

There is perhaps some wisdom, then, in keeping the traditional description of truth as an adequation of intelligence to thing rather than as a static conformity between subject and object. Object suggests an opposition that cannot be overcome, a gap that cannot be bridged, which clearly is not the case where there is truth. Thing, which still can be opposed to intelligence, as that which takes its stand in being rather than just in intelligence, is not defined by this opposition. It is defined rather by what it is as it stands in being and as it presents itself to be represented, as that with which representation has to compose in the exercise of judgment.

It is perhaps because Heidegger thought of *das Seiende* or *das All des Seienden* as only an object at hand or a set of objects in the world, *inner-weltliches Seiende*, from which *Sein* or be had to be distinguished in the ontological difference, that he could not accept being as being as the proper subject for the question of being. This is perhaps also why he thought of the entire tradition that accepted this definition of the subject of metaphysics as culminating only in

technological science. But such a culmination does not follow from a proper understanding of being as being as the subject of metaphysics, nor from the understanding of thing as that to which intelligence relates in truth. It follows only from a conception of being or of thing as an object at hand to be handled or manipulated, which is only one particular mode of being and not being as including all its differences in its analogy. In his destruction of metaphysics, Heidegger appears to have had such a particular conception of being in mind and not the transcendently open conception of being as being.

The conception of "thing," as we argued in the Introduction to Part Three, on the properties of being, follows the conception of being in its transcendental, unlike object, which cannot include that against which it stands. "Thing" refers to *what* a being is or its essence and, as such, it can include any subject as well as any object. Kant could think of the human subject as a *Ding an sich* as much as of any other object. What a thing is in the concrete, or the conception of essence, can, of course, be understood as referring to many different ways of being, depending on the diversity and multiplicity of being itself as given in experience. The question of truth, then, as an adequation of intelligence to thing, becomes a question of discovering being in its differences, in what it is or how it is for this or that being, this or that kind of being, and so on. This is the passage from our first conception of being to what can be expressed as the special modes of being spoken of earlier. In this sense the quest for truth can be understood as that of the particular sciences. In the more transcendental quest that we are pursuing here, we try to express what being is simply as being and what its properties are simply as being.

In saying that being is true, we are saying not only that being as being is what truth aims at, but also that truth aims at every being in its essence or in the stand it takes in being, for being is found only in its differences, whatever they are. This is the aspect of essentialism that remains true not just for the particular sciences, but also for metaphysics, since knowing for us attains being only by representing for itself *what* presents itself or takes its stand in being as we experience it. The quest for truth is a quest for what things are in this standing and it does not attain the full scope of being beyond mere facticity except through such representation of what and how they are.

7.3 The Affirmation of Truth in Being

We have known that being is true from the beginning. In saying that

knowing is of being, we were already expressing the relating that is the essence of truth. Knowing, as Aquinas puts it, is a certain effect of truth— *quidam veritatis effectus*. What the idea of true adds to that of being is a conformity between or an adequation of thing and intelligence, and knowing the thing follows from this conformity or adequation (*Ver I, I, c*). This, however, presupposes a priority of the conception of being over that of truth, since it is only with reference to being that the question of truth appears. If being were not for us the point of reference, so to speak, there would be no question of truth. We think we have the truth only when we think we have a conformity in our minds with what is and we seek such adequation when we think we do not have it.

We think of truth, therefore, with reference to being itself in its being opened up to intelligence, or as intelligible. To the extent that we know anything, it is being that we know, and, conversely, the being that we do know is surely intelligible. For how else can we know it if not by making it somehow intelligible to us? But are we to suppose that we know all being from the beginning? Can we not suppose that there is some being that we do not know? What of this being that is not yet intelligible to us? Is it intelligible in itself? If so, how do we know that it is intelligible in itself without having it as intelligible to us?

If we are going to say that truth is a property of being, we are going to have to say that being is intelligible in itself and not just to us. Indeed, we are going to have to say that our own sense of intelligence is modeled on being, and not the other way around. In truth it is being that has to have priority, and not just our understanding or what is in our mind, which can also be false or inadequate as well as true or adequate. But how can we know that being is true in itself otherwise than through our understanding what is in our mind?

This is the question we still have to answer if we are going to think of true as a property of being, whether we know all there is to know or not. We have approached the question of truth phenomenologically, or from its logical side. We have spoken of it from the side of intelligence, even though we have tried to think of it as an intelligence of being. Now we must try to think of it from the ontological side, or the side of being itself, to see if and how it is in being itself that truth is found. We must pass from our experience of truthfulness to the thought of truthfulness itself in being.

In doing so we have to go from what is *a posteriori*, or what is given in our understanding in the presencing of being, to what is *a priori* in being itself. Knowing is a certain effect of truth in us, as we have just seen. We must proceed from this effect to its cause, so to

speak, that is, to being itself as truthful and as that which is the model for our idea of truth. Our aim, then, must be to reverse the perspective from which we begin in the experience of the essential relating which truth is and think it through to its other side, which is that of being itself.

This is a difficult task for us, since we are always left only with our own understanding to accomplish this task of reaching beyond any given understanding. But it is a task that is already begun for us in the exercise of judgment, which includes an act of critical reflection as well as an act of understanding. It is through this act of reflection that being presences itself and even imposes itself, so to speak, to make us critical of what we might be thinking only arbitrarily or uncritically. What we have to do, then, is see how reflection takes us beyond our understanding to being itself in its truth, or rather how reflection opens up understanding to let being present itself.

To understand is somehow to represent things for myself. When I begin to reflect upon my understanding in this representation, to see if it is true to reality, I begin to think back to what presents itself in what can be referred to as a process of verification. This process can take different forms in different kinds of judgment. But the reflection that is essential to any such process is an act in search of evidence or of how being shines forth in this or that representation.

The first evidence we have appealed to from the beginning of our inquiry is that knowing is of being. From this we can say immediately that the being we do know is intelligible in fact. But is the being we do know in fact all of being? Or is it only part of the being to which our intelligence is open as a whole? If it is only a part of being, if there is more of being than what we know, how do we know that this "more" is also intelligible? Can we think of this more as anything but intelligible, given the way being presents itself initially in our knowing? Is it possible to think of anything as being positively and as unintelligible at the same time? How can being ever present itself to intelligence itself except as intelligible? Is there any evidence for answering this question?

We should note that the question arises when we begin to introduce some differentiation in the initial evidence that knowing is of being. In this respect we are going beyond the original insight of Parmenides into being by recognizing some differentiation in our first conception of being. Being is thought of in many ways in the exercise of judgment. Affirmation, which is an affirmation of being, is expressed in many ways. It is always limited by the terms we use in a particular exercise of judgment.

At first affirmation tends to be purely positive. Our first

representations, which are expressed in the terms of judgment, tend to be affirmed simply as true, that is, as expressive of a mode of being. But as we become aware of diversity in modes of being and of mistakes in identifying them through our representation, we begin to deny as well as to affirm and to differentiate between diverse modes of being. In this way we not only move from our first conception of being, which is still without any expression of particular modes of being, whether specific or generic. We also become aware that we do not know all of being or that our actual representation of being may not be equal to the whole of being itself. We do not lose our very first evidence that knowing is of being, but we begin to ask ourselves about being which we may not know about. And it is in this moment of questioning that the question we are now concerned with arises. Is the being that we do not know itself intelligible as well as the being we do know?

We cannot go back on our first evidence that knowing is of being, though we do question our way of representing being. We cannot knowingly deny our knowing of something, even when it is that we do not know anything. Nor can we deny that we know being when we do know something, though we may have some difficulty in relating that something to being as such. If we exercise judgment of any kind, directly or indirectly, we acknowledge this first evidence of being. But in doing so, we also acknowledge a certain convertibility between knowing and being. When we think of knowing in any strict sense, we think of it as a knowing of being, and when we think of being, we think of it as what is known when knowing takes place. Thus, when we try to think of some unknown being, we can only think of it as knowable in some fashion, as intelligible, or as true in itself, even though we do not presently know it for what it is.

Speaking subjectively, I can say that what is not known to me does not exist for me. But more objectively, I can also say generally that what is not knowable in any way whatsoever simply does not exist or is not. I cannot think of being except as intelligible. The only limit to intelligibility is nothing, which does not exist or is not, but which is still intelligible in some sense as negation, that is, as relative to affirmation or to what is.

Thus, the conception of truth or of the intelligibility of being necessarily follows our first conception of being, which is itself the very first intelligibility for us. Being is the proper object of intelligence, or what intelligence aims at, in the same way that color is the proper object of sight or sound is the proper object of hearing. Just as it is impossible to think of color as invisible, even though I cannot see it, or of sound as inaudible, even though I cannot hear it, so it is impossible

to think of being as unintelligible, even though I do not presently understand it fully. This impossibility of thought is the sign of an immediate evidence in the way we know being or being makes itself known, even when being is not known fully or adequately.

In fact, the same evidence can be brought out in the sense we have that being itself is not known fully or adequately. This sense of inadequacy in knowing gives rise to wonder and to questioning. To wonder or to question is to recognize that we do not know all there is to be known. To begin to inquire, however, is to presuppose that there is some intelligibility to be understood, since otherwise we would not begin to inquire. Now some inquiries may terminate in the recognition of an absence of intelligibility or in the insight that there is nothing there to be understood. But even such inquiries are understood in relation to other inquiries giving more positive results in terms of intelligibility, an intelligibility that can only relate to being ultimately. It is being itself as that which is to be understood in its fullness that gives rise to our questioning, and not just some deconstructive agitation in an understanding that thinks of itself as inadequate.

This can be seen in a particular science such as biology, for example. When proteins were first discovered, a whole new line of inquiry was opened up to disclose what they were and what they did. The same can be said about the DNA molecule, the exploration of which is now the cutting edge of biological investigation. Even the discovery of any unique individual in the world will send us scurrying to see if there are others of the same kind in reality and to understand *what* that kind might be. Being, as that which is to be known, is what calls us to these inquiries. Though particular sciences may not think of it precisely as being, but only as some particular object of inquiry, insofar as they claim to be science or knowledge of reality, and not just an intellectual game, they presuppose the same convertibility of being and intelligibility as we are proposing here. Insofar as they exercise judgment properly, they affirm the same intelligibility of being as any other exercise of judgment does and they are aiming at that intelligibility through their own critical reflection or investigation.

Even the experience of inadequacy in knowing can be seen as pointing to this immediate evidence of being as true. When the human being faces what presents itself, it can not only represent it, but also misrepresent it. Falsehood can appear as well as truth through the understanding. In saying that every being is true, we are not saying that there can be no falsehood. What gives rise to truth in understanding can also give rise to falsehood. What is meant to disclose being can also foreclose on it or leave it undisclosed. But even to recognize this difference between truth and falsehood in

knowing presupposes the thought that truth is rooted in being, and not just in our thought, and that only being can give rise to truth. Without the reference to being there could be no thought of truth in knowing, no critical reflection. There would be only an agility to represent or to fabricate without concern for what is, pure destruction or deconstruction without any regard for what is in its essence or structure.

Similarly, it can be seen that the recognition of error in the exercise of judgment presupposes the same evidence of truth in being itself. Our first representations of being are expressed positively in affirmative judgments. As long as we have not become fully critical in the exercise of judgment, we tend to take our representations as true at face value. With the rise of critical reflection in experience, however, we not only begin to doubt this face value of representations, but also begin to deny some of these representations, whether they are from ourselves or from others. We begin to make negative judgments as well as affirmative judgments, and many more that are partially negative and partially affirmative when we distinguish a part that is false and a part that is true in an initial hypothesis or supposition. These negative judgments, however, are based not on some representation of something else than being, which could only be nothing, as Parmenides understood from the beginning, but on some other positive representation that is seen as possibly truer to being. When I reject some representation as false, it is because I see some other representation as true or as calling for further investigation, always presupposing that it is in being itself that truth is to be found and doubt is to be resolved.

It may also be that, through a long effort of critical reflection and reconstruction of representations, we may arrive at some universal conception of being, such as that of Hegel, for example, which may still have to be deconstructed, but even such deconstruction, if it is to be taken seriously as a concern for truth, presupposes the conception of being as true in itself and as that which is to be attained ultimately.

7.4 The Impossibility of False Being

Given this understanding of being as true, is it then possible to think of being as false or even in any way doubtful? The question might appear facetious in some ways, but it can also help us to understand why Parmenides had to be so categorical in his separation of the two ways, the way of truth and the way of falsehood, and in his rejection of the

second. If we take being as one of a kind or as univocal in the way that Parmenides did, then we have to say that being can only be true and cannot in any way be false. We have to oppose false to true in the same way as nonbeing is opposed to being. Falsehood is then something that can only apply to a way for human being, but a way that leads to nothing, not to being. It is a way not only of doubt, but also of total suspense in nothingness. The way of truth, on the other hand, which is the only way of certainty, is focused on the fullness of being.

When we allow for differentiation in being, however, or when we see this first conception of being as expressed in diverse modes of being, are we still held to this same kind of absolute opposition between false and true? Or is there some sense in which some beings might be spoken of as false, even though being in itself can only be understood as true?

In one way, even with the analogy of being, the opposition between truth and falsehood has to remain absolute, as stated by Parmenides. If being is true, then it is all that is intelligible, while unintelligible can only refer to nonbeing, so to speak. There is no limit to intelligibility other than being and no limit to being itself other than nonbeing, which, of course, is not an other in any way, since only a being can be an other. We cannot search for falsehood, as if it represented something, except as a possible hindrance to our search for truth, which does represent being. Falsehood can only be understood as a negation or as a privation of truth.

Yet, insofar as we think of truth as a property of being in its relating to intelligence and of being as differentiated, we can also begin to think of some representations of being as false in at least two senses. We are not stuck with only one representation of being, as Parmenides was. We have diverse representations of being, presumably of beings diverse in themselves. Thus we can represent one thing as something it is not, as when we speak of false gold. The thing we are speaking of is not nothing. It is something. But what it is is not what we represent it to be. When we discover that it is not gold, we may still have to discover what it really is in itself. But we already know that our first representation of what it is was false, that is, did not represent the thing itself but was rather a misrepresentation, and that the truth of being in this case is other than what we thought it was.

Representations can be thought of as false, however, not just in terms of what a thing is, but also in terms of expectations that follow from representations. Thus, when I represent someone to myself as a friend, I come to expect certain kinds of behavior from him in my

regard. But when he does not meet these expectations, when he betrays me, for example, I start to represent him as a false friend or as no friend at all. This will not keep me from representing him still as a human being, but it will keep me from representing him as a friend.

Thus there is a sense in which I may speak of things as false, but I can think of them as false only in relation to the representation that gives rise to the relation of truth. It is not the thing itself that is false. It has its truth, which may or may not be known. It is rather the representation that is false, which then has to be rectified or made true in the etymological sense of "verified." In any event the opposition between true and false remains no less absolute than the opposition between being and nonbeing. The question remains always one of disclosing being in its identity or in its diverse identities and interconnections or interaction.

CHAPTER 8

Being as Good

We have already spoken of the good as a property of being, in conjunction with truth. The conception of being as good arises in the same way as the conception of being as true, through the relating of being to human being, in which all being *comes together*. Just as truth expresses the *coming together* of being with the cognitive activity of human being, so also good expresses the *coming together* of being with the appetitive activity of human being.

As a property of being, however, the good still has to be conceived as distinct from the one, the active, and the true, because, in the being that is somehow everything or whose nature it is to come together with every being, the activity of appetite is distinct from the activity of cognition. Our conception of good has to follow our conception of being in the same way as our conception of truth follows that very first conception in its transcendental analogy.

Nor must we think that goodness is only relative to our appetite rather than in being itself. To be sure, the thought of goodness requires the thought of an appetite, since, as Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the good is that which all things aim at or go after. Phenomenologically speaking, therefore, we speak of the good in relation to our appetite. It is the appetible. But that does not make goodness itself something only relative to our appetite or something purely subjective, so to speak, as if being itself were not good or as if the good were not in being itself. It is being itself that has to be seen as good if we are to make any sense of appetite as distinct from just knowing, since appetite appears as a second movement toward the being that discloses itself in the clearing of truth.

Knowing is an activity that terminates in the mind or in an expression of the truth grasped through the exercise of judgment. But appetite is an activity that begins from knowing and terminates in being itself, which is why we inevitably think of being as appetible, something somehow good. Only through the conception of being can we come to a proper conception of the good as that to which appetite relates.

To arrive at this conception of being as good we must proceed as we did for the conception of being as true. We must think of being, or beings, not just as standing apart but as coming together in a universe, in a kind of concentration through human being. Being, as

we have already said, is not thought of as closed up within itself, but as disclosing itself in our knowing. Knowing is thus a gathering of all being together, while human being is the opening or the clearing in which being opens itself. In this opening, however, there is not only a disclosing of being, but also an appealing from being that is not adverted to from the standpoint of knowing as such or in the modern concern for objectivity alone. But it is an appealing to which appetite responds. What we refer to as "appetite" is in response to this appealing. It appears as a second movement, after knowing, and it takes us beyond mere disclosure, which terminates in the knower as an expression of understanding, back to the thing itself in its goodness. *Verum est in mente, sed bonum est in re.*

This conception of being as good thus keeps open the circle of knowing and being we have spoken of in the exercise of judgment from the beginning in saying that knowing is of being, so that we not only acquiesce in the truth we come to know, but also remain in quest of it insofar as there is something more to be known and inquired into, for truth itself is something good for the intelligence. It is through the appeal of being that we come to its goodness, whether as satisfying our desire to know or any other desire. Just as the human being is the only one who brings being as being into the open in questioning, so also it is the only one that can embrace it or reject it in its appeal as good.

8.1 The Essence of Goodness

Good cannot be defined in terms of genus and specific difference any more than being, one, active, or true. Like the other transcendental ideas, it is a first notion through which other notions may be defined, but which is not itself properly definable. What it means is known only in the actual exercise of an activity we speak of as appetite as distinct from knowing in human being. The good, to repeat the classical formula Aristotle falls back on, which is not strictly a definition, is that which all aim at or go after. What is this aiming at or going after and how does it arise from our conception of being as good or from the appeal of being itself?

We have not dwelt upon this activity of human being which we refer to as appetite as we have upon the activity of knowing. To bring out the essence of goodness, however, we must do so, for it is only through this activity that this essence becomes manifest, just as it is only through the activity of knowing that the essence of truth becomes

manifest.

Let us note first that, as we have already intimated, appetite is an activity that is distinct from that of knowing. We may think of it as coming before knowing, inasmuch as we can speak of a desire to know. In this sense we may even think of truth as good. Questioning is a questing after truth. Truth is something we desire. It is that in which we acquiesce in good judgment when we have found answers to our questions. In truth being is responding to our quest for knowing so that the relating of truth is already a relating of goodness in one sense.

But that is not yet the full relating of goodness, since appetite is also an activity that follows upon knowing. Appetite is itself a response to being perceived as good. It presupposes some form of consciousness and it starts from a perception of being as desirable or good. Knowing, as an activity, terminates in a word or an expression of what is perceived. As such it remains in the mind. But appetite goes out of the mind back to the thing itself. It is a response to the thing in its goodness.

How is this response to be understood? First of all it must be understood as following knowing. Without knowing or consciousness of some object, even if it be only a vague fantasy, we have no appetite. We begin to desire something or acquiesce in it only if we somehow fancy it as good. Even the desire to know presupposes some preconception of truth as good. We may think of appetite as a blind impulse at times, but it is not strictly blind. Appetite is a going after or an aiming at, beginning from a perception of something as good, even if the perception be false. It is even a sending of oneself after, as the middle form of the verb suggests in the classical expression for the good as that which all things aim at: *epihesthai*. Appetite comes only after some form of integrated consciousness, whether sensible or rational.

But is it enough to say that appetite follows from knowing? Does it follow just casually, so that appetite may or may not come into play with regard to what we know? Or does it follow necessarily, so that willy nilly appetite does come into play with regard to everything we come to know? All human activity starts from caring or concern, including that of caring or concern for the truth. But this caring or concern does not stop with just learning. It is enhanced by learning, which only gives rise to a new dimension of caring and concern with regard to what is learned. Is there not some care about anything we do come to know? Is there not some necessary response to what comes to be known in any new awareness? The response may not be determined to go one way or the other. It may be one of acceptance or

one of rejection or even one of indifference. It may be free. But even in freedom it is still necessary in the sense that some response is inescapably called for or some attitude is inevitably adopted with respect to what we are newly aware of.

Appetite is thus a responsibility that cannot be avoided. We become fully responsible only for what we do freely. We may choose some particular responsibilities over others. But we do not choose responsibility itself. We only find ourselves responsible in the response that follows any awareness of some good. It is in this sense that appetite is an impulse, though it is not blind. And it is from this necessary connection between appetite and knowing that we pass from the conception of being as true to the conception of being as good, for the necessary response we experience to any new knowledge of being is but a relating to being in the appeal of its goodness. The good is thus what we send ourselves after in the opening where we stand and where being is opened up, not only as present, but also as appealing in this relating. The essence of good is thus, like the essence of truth, a relating that, after standing in the open adhering to something open as something open, surges across the opening, so to speak, in response to the appeal of what is opened up in knowing.

We should note also that this relating to the good through appetite is not merely desire or a striving after something that is not yet possessed. To the extent that the opening in the relating implies a distance, appetite has the form of a desire or a striving after, as I crave food that I see but that I have not yet consumed or for a friend who is on my mind but absent. But it is the very same appetite that finds satisfaction in consuming the food or in enjoying the presence of the friend. Appetite does not cease with satisfaction or enjoyment. It simply finds fulfillment and acquiesces in the good. Without some sense of acquiescence, which somehow closes the distance in the opening where we stand in desire, there would not be any sense of desire, which implies some deprivation as well as distance. We have desire only if we can think of satisfaction, and the satisfaction is simply the passage of appetite from deprivation to fulfillment. Desire as appetite simply continues in its fulfillment through acquiescence. Satisfaction of one desire may give rise to other desires, but as the satisfaction of a desire it is the most perfect exercise of an appetite.

Appetite is thus an alternation of striving and acquiescing. It cannot be both at once. For when one is striving for something one cannot acquiesce in it and when one is acquiescing in some good one is no longer striving for it. But it is in the acquiescing that one best appreciates what the good really is. To know the good in this way is to

know it better than we knew it when we were only desiring. To leave acquiescing out of appetite therefore is not only to cut appetite short but also to leave out what is most essential in the conception of the good. Even if we try to think of desire itself as the highest good, as we sometimes do when we think of the absence of desire as an absence of life and true existence, we are only thinking of desire as somehow fulfilling and as something to be acquiesced in. Desire itself is in this sense already a beginning of fulfillment and acquiescence.

If we think of appetite as a response in the opening where being discloses itself, we have to think of being itself as somehow appealing. Appetite, like knowing, emerges in the opening where being is disclosed. Truth is the disclosedness of being in this opening. It is a relating (*Verhalten*) that stands in the open and adheres to something open as something open, as we saw with Heidegger. But in this relating we find more than just disclosing. We find also a response to an attraction or an appealing of being that draws to itself or elicits care of some kind on the part of the knower. We not only care to know, we also care about what we come to know in response to its goodness.

Appetite can thus be seen as an effect of the good in human being, just as knowing can be seen as an effect of truth. If there were no good in being itself, there would be no appetite. If there were something that is not in any way good, there could be no appetite for it, no caring about it. But in speaking of being as good, we are saying that there is no being about which there is no caring. We are affirming what we have to refer to as an ontological goodness of every being insofar as it is. We do this not so much on the grounds that we happen to find some particular being desirable, whether that of another or our own, but more precisely on the grounds that we cannot think of any being except as appetible, as we shall argue in speaking of the acknowledgment of goodness in all actuality. To say that everything is good as being is not just to express a figment of our appetite, as Spinoza would have it in his *Ethics of Absolute Substance* (*Eth* Part I, Appendix). It is to recognize the necessity of goodness in being itself.

8.2 The Goodness of Essence

This is not to say much yet about the particular goodness of anything. But it is to affirm a certain goodness of essence in its very being and it is to open up a whole new perspective on being which the conception of truth alone does not give us, a perspective in which something can appear as good, bad, or indifferent in relation to some conception of

goodness. This perspective remains to be articulated analogously, in keeping with the analogy of being itself, but in differentiating the good from the true as a property of being we are opening a new line of articulation in the analogy of being according to its difference, the line Platonism was more inclined to consider than Aristotelianism.

We are not saying that all beings are equally good or of equal value, for there remains a whole differentiation of goodness to be worked out, just as there is a differentiation of being on which to reflect. But we are saying that in every being, whatever it is, there is some ontological goodness. If we are repelled by one form of being, it is not because there is no good in that form but rather because we are more drawn by some other form. If we think of something as bad or evil, it is because we think of it as lacking a form or some good it should have. Our conception of the good appears phenomenologically through the twofold act of desiring and acquiescing, but it appears this way only because appetite itself is a response to the appeal of being as it discloses itself in truth. It is being that appeals in the disclosing and we come to think of being itself as good in our responding to the appeal.

8.3 Goodness and Perfection

It is not our task here to begin articulating the differentiation of ontological goodness as one might do in a discourse on ethics or a metaphysics of the different degrees of being or goodness. But it is our task to reflect upon one way in which the conception of the good differs from the conception of being, even while thinking of the good as convertible with being. Our conception of ontological goodness emerges through our responding to the appeal of being that we call appetite, as we have said. We might think of this response, which is rational as well as sensible, as most fundamentally an acquiescence in being itself as being. I acquiesce in being for what it is, which is not to constitute its goodness but to acknowledge it. But acquiescing in this way does not bring out an important difference in our conception of goodness that sets it off from our conception of just being as being or, better still, it does not bring out the dynamic aspect of our first conception of being as what relates to action.

This difference can be seen through the relation between the two sides or the two acts of appetite, which remains for us desire as much as acquiescence. If we think of appetite only as acquiescence, we are left with a conception of the good that is flat and

undifferentiated. The good is whatever we acquiesce in. But is the good we acquiesce in all the good there is or is there some other good that we might also acquiesce in but that we can only desire at present? The thought of some higher good than that in which we presently acquiesce has to occur to us as long as we remain beings of desire as well as of acquiescence.

Thus, to think of the *good simply* we would have to think of a good that leaves nothing more to be desired, a good that would be totally satisfying and fulfilling. Anything short of that would not be good absolutely, or at least would not be *good simply*, but only good *secundum quid*. We could not think of any thing we do acquiesce in as simply bad, or not good in any way, since we do acquiesce in it. To acquiesce in anything is to enjoy it as good. But when there is still desire, along with the acquiescence, then we do not think of the present good, that in which are acquiescing, as *simply good*, but only as good in some respect, namely, in the respect in which we presently acquiesce in it.

Thus, the being that we know immediately can come to be thought of as good, insofar as it satisfies some appetite, but not as *good simply*, insofar as it does not satisfy all appetite. In other words, we can think of something as *being simply* without thinking of it as good simply. We can still say that every being is good ontologically, insofar as we can acquiesce in it, but we do not have to say that whatever is is good simply insofar as the being we acquiesce in leaves room for desire or striving. When we think of something as good simply or without qualification, we think of it as leaving nothing to be desired and as giving rise to full acquiescence without any further desire.

Whether we can ever experience such full acquiescence in any being or whether there is any being that can give rise to such full acquiescence remains to be seen. In any event, the conceptions of being and of the good remain essentially intertwined even in this difference between them. The being that we would think of as most fully satisfying would be the one that *is* most fully. On the other hand, even that which is not fully satisfying can still be thought of as *being simply*, though it is not *good simply* or fully satisfying. It is the conception of a good that is absolutely satisfying that is difficult for us to entertain. How can full acquiescence in such a good be understood as long as we remain beings of desire? It seems that every acquiescence only gives rise to renewed desire.

The idea of a full acquiescence and of an absolutely satisfying good can nevertheless be illustrated in some particular order of goodness where we can experience a fullness of acquiescence in

some respect. Maturity and health in a living organism, for example, can be thought of as such an acquiescence, and the good in such an acquiescence can be thought of as fully or even most satisfying. Maturity and health are an absolute good, so to speak, for the organism, though we still have to qualify this good in relation to other goods or to other orders of appetite and achievement. Nevertheless, with reference to the organism, they are good simply and without qualification, since no higher good can be thought of for that organism as such. Maturity and health leave nothing to be desired in the nature of this organism. If they could be maintained to perfection over time the organism would have nothing to desire as organism. It could only acquiesce in its own goodness.

The same idea of fullness can be illustrated in other orders of appetite as well. To get to the idea of a fullness without any limitation whatsoever, an absolutely absolute goodness, so to speak, we have only to think of a good that would satisfy all possible desire. This is the ultimate meaning of goodness in its transcendentality. On the one hand, it expands our conception of being beyond what is merely disclosed in the opening where we stand as open to what is open. But, on the other hand, it only enters into the expanded conception as that aspect of being in its appealing to which appetite relates. Goodness itself, like being, has its differences which give rise to different appetites, rational as well as sensible, according to the different kinds of consciousness from which appetite can begin, so that a total conception of the good has to include an ordering of these appetites in their relation to the good in all its differences.

Hence though we think of every being as ontologically good in its present appeal, we do not think of it as simply or absolutely good, but good only in some respect as being. Good though it is in its being, it may still have some good to achieve or be desirous of such good. It is in relation to these two sides of goodness that the idea of *perfection* arises along with that of goodness. In its relating to appetite, the good appears as that which fulfills or makes it perfect. This is especially evident in human being, which is good in its being according to its first perfection or natural form, but which also still has to achieve its goodness or second perfection through its own activity.

In a being that has to achieve its ultimate goodness, *being simply* and *being good simply* are not the same. The being may be already good insofar as it is actually, but it is not yet good simply, insofar as it has yet to achieve its more complete goodness, its own perfection or its goodness simply, through its proper activity. The appeal of goodness in being calls for more than the fundamental or ontological acquiescence in being simply according to one's first

perfection. It calls for an achievement of goodness that is to come as fulfillment of what already is simply, so that the idea of ontological perfection is integral to the idea of the good as we have it through appetite seen as both acquiescence and desire or striving. The same relation also allows for an idea of imperfection and defection in the beings for which the same twofold appetite of acquiescence and desire or striving holds. A being may be good or perfect insofar as it is actually, but still be imperfect or deficient with respect to the second perfection it should have or ought to achieve through its proper activity.

We are accustomed to think of perfection rather statically, much as Plato thought of the Good. In modern philosophy it is often thought of as pertaining only to God, whose idea is that of "Most Perfect." But this is not where or how the idea of perfection first occurs to us. It occurs first in our experience of appetite as both desire and acquiescence with reference to being in the concrete, and it is illustrated through particular instances of fulfillment such as the one we alluded to with reference to an organism.

Etymologically speaking, not to say ontologically speaking as well, the idea of *per-fectio* presupposes a kind of dynamism, a coming to be, which may not be strictly applicable to God, who is thought of as immobile in his eternal being. What is *per-fect* in the strict etymological sense is something that has come to be and has reached a certain completion in its identity as a being, so that what has not come to be cannot properly be said to be perfect, or perfected. As Aquinas puts it, "*quod factum non est, nec perfectum posse dici videtur*" (SG I, 28, 268). What has not come into being or is not a *fact* as the result of a process, cannot be said to have come to the completion of its coming to be in what we have called its first perfection. We call this a "perfection" because we understand it as the good that was desired in the process and that is acquiesced in once the process has been completed. We call it only a "first perfection," the perfection of being simply, because we think that this being has yet to achieve its own further perfection through its proper activity. The idea of perfection, as it is first understood, thus implies that what is perfect has come to be such and that what it has become is not just a termination of the process but an end, its *telos*, desired and acquiesced in, in short, a good, even if it is only the good of being simply prior to any further achievement of goodness or perfection.

The idea of perfection is thus the same as the idea of goodness as goodness relates back to a process of coming to be that has come to some completion. That is the point of adding the preposition '*per*' to the perfect participle of the verb '*fieri*' or *factum esse*.' It expresses the idea that something has come *through* to the end of its coming to be

and is a totality in identity, something *totaliter factum* (Blanchette 1992,41-73). As such, a thing is understood as already good, even when it still has to achieve its own goodness through its proper activity.

8.4 The Acknowledgment of Goodness in Actuality

To argue for transcendental goodness as a property of being we cannot revert back to the exercise of judgment as we have done for transcendental unity and transcendental truth. We have to revert rather to the exercise of appetite that we experience directly as a consequence of judgment and which we had to refer to in formulating our conception of the good to begin with. It is because this exercise of appetite is distinct from that of judgment in the human self that we come to distinguish the good from the true in our conception of being. And it is because the exercise of appetite follows necessarily upon any exercise of judgment that we come to think of being as good, not because we want it to be so, but because we find it to be so as it appeals in the opening where it discloses itself. Just as knowing is an effect of being in its truth, so also appetite is an effect of being in its goodness.

What we have to show is that appetite is indeed a responding to the goodness of being itself as it appeals in the relating of goodness. How is this responding to be seen as related to the goodness of being itself and not just as a subjective disposition or a vain desire on our part or from our side of the opening? How is it a response to being itself, so that we have to think of being as good, or of the good as in being and not just as a figment of our mind? How is appetite a response to being itself? How is it an acknowledgment of goodness in the actuality of being?

We have seen how appetite is twofold. It is desire for the good not possessed and acquiescence in the good possessed. It is the relation between these two aspects of appetite that gives rise to the idea of goodness as perfection, that is, as that which brings a process to completion. For, as desire, appetite gives rise to the idea of something needed for satisfaction or fulfillment and, as acquiescence, it gives rise to the experience of satisfaction and fulfillment itself. Our experience of appetite combines these two in such a way that, without some acquiescence, we would have no proper conception of the good as perfecting and, without desire, which can recur even with acquiescence, we would have no proper conception of the good as a perfection to be achieved or aimed at. How does all this relate to the

conception of being as good?

8.4.1 Goodness as Second Perfection

Let us think first of the *good simply*, or of the perfection that brings this good, that is, of second or final perfection, since only that which has its ultimate perfection is said to be *good simply*. This good is arrived at only through the activity of a being, so that, in relation to this good at least, appetite appears as a principle of activity, whether as striving or as acquiescing. In this sense the good or final perfection of a being is found in its final actualization through its own action. Short of this self-actualization a thing might be good in some sense, but not simply or without qualification.

To understand this we do not have to presuppose that any being ever achieves some kind of absolute perfection or goodness. We have only to understand the distinction between second and first perfection and understand second perfection as any kind of self-actualization that somehow completes the first perfection of a being. This can be illustrated in our own exercise of appetite. The good for us is not simply what we are given by nature. It is rather what we are to be through our own self-actualization. This is something we aim at or send ourselves after. Prescinding from what that good might or should consist in specifically as ethical perfection of human being, it is possible to see that it will be good in its very actuality, as something that is over and above what we are now, for, whatever that actuality may be, it will be that which we are already going or sending ourselves after and that in which we shall acquiesce as in the fulfillment of our appetite.

What we think of as the good to be achieved through action or as the good simply is thus the actuality we desire and in which we can acquiesce. This does not mean that any actuality is as good as any other. It is still possible to think of some actualities as evil, as we shall indicate, insofar as they do not conform to a true good. But even in the case of evil we still think of the actuality as good insofar as it is something positively achieved. Insofar as it is something it is still good, even though it is in contradiction with the true good.

How the good simply can be at odds with itself in this way depends on the fact that it issues from a free initiative, which can give rise to moral evil as well as goodness, or from a fallible power, which does not always achieve the good its natural development aims at. Frustration itself is a part of our experience of appetite, when the good

we achieve is not something we can fully acquiesce in. But even in frustration as well as in evil, if we focus on the actuality achieved as something relating positively to appetite, we see it as good. It is in this relating to appetite that being appears as good. Any actuality of a being relates to appetite in this way, even when it is not fully in accord with all that its appetite aspires to. What every being as active goes after is its own good through self-actualization, which is the completion of its being or its second perfection. This is understood as good precisely as it relates to appetite, the desire for some completion in being or the acquiescence in such completion.

All this applies especially to human being, our primary analogate of being. If we go from this primary analogate to beings with an activity that is less than rational but still conscious and sentient, the same relating of actuality to appetite can easily be seen to obtain. Other conscious beings too, as we conceive them, find the good simply or their second perfection in the exercise of their own proper activity and function.

With beings that lack consciousness of any kind we can no longer speak of appetite properly, since appetite, as we understand it here, presupposes some consciousness or awareness of something as good. However, inasmuch as we can still speak of some proper activity on their part, we can still speak of a good for them as what is achieved through this activity. We say this because such beings are still active as beings and because activity implies some kind of inclination or appetite toward some good.

At the limit, only where there is no activity whatsoever, and hence no fullness of being, will we say that there is no good to be achieved through self-actualization, just as we said that anything lacking any activity of its own could not be thought of as being with an identity of its own. Conversely, nevertheless, to the extent that we shall be able to speak of matter not as being in act, but as being only in potency, we shall think of this being in potency as an inclination, if not as an appetite properly, toward some act as to its good or its perfection or its actualization, for the act of a potency is all these things at once, as we shall see more clearly later on.

8.4.2 Goodness as First or Ontological Perfection

Every being that achieves some actuality of its own is thus good, since such an actuality is the ultimate object of appetite. Appetite, however, presupposes a being already in existence with some degree of

completion and identity that has its own appetite as well as its own consciousness. Is this being in its first identity, prior to any actualization through activity of its own, also good or is the idea of the good restricted to that of an achieved self-actualization or second perfection? Can we speak of any being in its very first identity as a being as already good in some sense, if not in the complete sense of something that is *good simply* in its full actualization? In other words, can we say there is an ontological goodness in any being precisely as being prior to any exercise of initiative on its part? If so, then we shall have to say that every being precisely as actual is good in some sense, even though it is not good simply according to the fullness of its self-actualization.

How can we show that this follows from our first understanding of being as it relates to appetite? To answer this question we must reflect on being in its given actuality, for being is given or at hand only in some actuality. Even if this actuality is thought of as in no way achieved by the being itself that is at hand, it is still an actuality, and as such it is a good, something to be desired or to be acquiesced in, at least by the being itself, in the way that a living thing clings to life. It is actuality as such that relates to appetite and that is therefore good, even when it is taken as merely given.

When we speak of being as being as the subject of metaphysics, we speak of it not as possible, but as an actuality that is already something to be thought of as a good or as the first perfection of a potency that yields a being that is somehow complete with an identity of its own, that is, an active identity. To think of being only as possible, as Wolff does, or as pure being supposedly equal to pure nothing, as Hegel does, is not yet to think of it as good any more than it is to think of it as true being. But to think of it as in act, or as actualized in any way, whether as merely given or as perfected through its own activity, is to think of it at the same time as good. *Be*, or the act of being, is thus what everything desires or acquiesces in from the beginning, regardless of how it further actualizes itself in its second perfection or its final goodness. Even in its truthfulness, being is already a good, for the exercise of judgment entails a certain acquiescence in the actual truth of being.

To put this in the reflective terms of a human being, this idea of being as good is clear to me as I reflect on my own being as given to me as it must be clear to you as you reflect on your own being as given to you. Now if I think of you as another being like myself and you think of me as another being like yourself, then we must also each think of the other as also good in its actuality. In other words, neither one of us, in our own given identity, is the only good. There are many

such goods relating as otherness in actuality, not only to their own individual appetite, but also to my own or to any rational appetite, which responds to this otherness of the good. For to recognize another as being other in actuality is to recognize it as a good in itself, even though I may not want it as the good for me individually.

This is especially clear when the other appears as another self like myself in the primordial experience of being through mutual recognition. In this we have the very first acknowledgment on an intellectual level of otherness in being or of being in otherness, where each one and the other is known as one and as active. In such recognition, the other is a good equal to my own good in its actuality.

But the same thing is also clear with regard to the recognition of lesser beings, which are also seen as good to the degree of their actuality. I cannot rationally desire or acquiesce in them as I would in a being of equal dignity, since they are not an equal good in actuality, yet I can desire and acquiesce in them in various ways, recognizing their true otherness and identity in actual being. I may want to know them better, so that I may use them better both for their own good as well as for my good or the human good. Once again, it is only at the limit of actuality itself that I stop thinking of anything as good, just as I stop thinking of it as one, active, true, or simply as a being. Otherwise, whatever is said to be in any proper sense of the term has to be thought of as good in its actuality.

To speak of this ontological goodness of any being in its first perfection or actuality is not to say much about the degree of goodness of anything in particular. Nor is it to absolutize the goodness of any particular thing, including that of human being, our primary analogate of being. It is only to recognize different degrees of goodness in a diversity of actuality such as is given to us. The ontological goodness we recognize in the actuality of any being is only relative. It is relative to its own final goodness, to be achieved through its own action, and to the goodness of other beings in their actuality and in their own striving for their final goodness. In fact, as we view a multiplicity and a diversity of beings striving each for their final goodness, we have to say that the goodness of each, given or achieved, is relative to the goodness or the perfection of all taken together as the universe in its actuality. Indeed, it is in this striving that the many and diverse beings come together as a universe.

We have spoken of ontological goodness as first perfection in contradistinction from the second perfection or final goodness achieved through a being's own initiative. To speak of this goodness as a perfection, however, is to suggest another way in which the

actuality of a being can be acknowledged as good even as merely given. The idea of *per-fec-tion* in its original sense, as already suggested, implies the idea of a process coming to some completion. What is perfect is what has been perfected through some process. Thus to speak of actuality as a perfection is to say that, even as given, actuality has come to be, and that what is given at the end of the process is a good arrived at that was somehow desired from the beginning, so that it can be acquiesced in as the end that fulfills. Acquiescence is itself a recognition of perfection. Thus, as a thing stands out in being or in its actuality, it stands out as something that was desired in some way and that can now be acquiesced in, even if it still has to achieve its own second perfection. The good, as we understand it, or as perfection, is tied to our conception of change and time, but, taken in its fullness or its ontological proportions, it transcends this particular mode of being and applies to any being as being in any actuality, whether higher or lower than our primary analogate.

8.5 The Possibility of Evil

It remains for us to reflect on how evil is to be conceived in the light of this ontological goodness we affirm of every being. We have already alluded to the possibility of evil in speaking of achieving goodness through self-actualization. How is this possibility to be conceived, if whatever is achieved or actualized positively is somehow good? Is there such a thing as evil and, if there is, in what does it consist? Can it be thought of as a thing of any kind?

The possibility of evil appears in the relation between what we have spoken of as the first and the second perfection of a being. It is only the second perfection of a being that allows us to speak of it as good simply, for a being only in its first perfection as a being is good only *secundum quid*, that is, in respect to its being actual, but it is not good simply, that is, in respect to its complete self-actualization. Evil is the opposite of good, but it is the opposite of the good simply, not of the good *secundum quid*, or of the ontological good as such. The possibility of evil appears first in the transition from first to second perfection when a being is free to choose the form of its own final actualization or when it can be frustrated in the achievement of this actuality. It is in this self-actualization that a certain contradiction can occur between the form a being actually takes and the form required for the good simply of the being.

The being that is simply and is already good *secundum quid* comes to be in a certain way or *secundum quid*, which may or may not be in conformity with what is good for it simply. When it is not in conformity with that good simply, we think of it as having become evil. In its most general sense, evil is this lack of conformity between what a thing becomes, or has become, and what it ought to be for its good. If we can speak of an absolute good simply for any being, we can also speak of an absolute evil for it as the opposite of that good. Such an evil, however, is still only a lack of that good which, in fact, may take many forms, each of which is positive in itself even as it falls short of the good for that being. If there is no absolute good simply for any being, but only relative good, evil is still only a lack of that good and the opposition between good and evil remains somehow absolute as an absence or a privation of the proper good.

Thus, evil is very real. It is even something positive in being, in that what is thought of as evil has a certain form. But as evil it is not a thing other than this positive form that is good in itself. Evil is experienced as frustration or as guilt. It is assessed on the basis of some good that is desired or to be acquiesced in, but it is judged to be only a lack of that good, which may be the good of an individual alone, the good of an order of beings, or the good of all beings in common.

As a lack or a privation, however, evil is not a thing or a being of any kind. In itself, so to speak, it is nothing or, better still, it is a privation of some good and therefore of being of some kind. Moral evil is a privation of moral good due in or to persons. Physical evil is a privation of any form a being should have or be able to acquiesce in according to its nature. In either case, real as the evil may be, it is still only a privation and not a being as such. It is actual only in the sense that the appetite in which it is experienced is actual. It is not experienced as a thing, but as a lack or a privation of goodness in a thing.

While it is possible to speak of physical and moral evil, as we have just done, is it possible to speak as well of an ontological evil as such in a way that parallels ontological goodness, as some authors sometimes try to suggest? If we take being to be good as being, as we are maintaining here, the only way this could be done would be by taking finitude or the limitation of determinate being as evil in some ontological sense, as these same authors attempt to do. But what ontological sense could this make? If evil as such is the privation of good, ontological evil would have to be the privation of being itself, or nothing at all, since actual being as such is at least good *secundum quid*. Nothing as such, however, is neither evil nor good nor being of any sort. The differentiation between good and evil in things

presupposes that something is, which, as we have argued, is already a good, though not necessarily good simply or as it should be.

Moreover, finitude or limitation in being, however it is to be understood, is not a negation or a privation of being as such. It is a positive stand in being which is also good, no matter how finite or limited. If we associate negation with finitude or limitation, it is not with reference to being as such, since any finite or limited being is still thought of as being in its finite or limited way. Negation in this instance is with reference to other beings, which a determinate being is not. *This* being is not *that* being. This kind of being is not that kind of being. In either case there is being on either side of the *not* or the limit. Both are beings in a positive way and hence are at least ontologically good. In fact, the kind of negation implied in finitude as such entails no privation on the part of the being that is affirmed positively. Finitude as such speaks not of an absence or a lack, but of a presence that not only is, but is good in its presencing, that is, insofar as it is.

Thus, while moral and physical evil are quite possible and real as part of our experience of being, there can be no such thing as ontological evil, in the same way as there can be no such thing as nothing. To say that some thing is evil will always imply that it is good at least in the sense that it is actually, but that it is not all the good that it should be simply. Even the being who is damned is good ontologically in its first perfection or actuality as a being, though it is not good as it should be in its second perfection. Its damnation consists precisely in the recognition of this privation of a good it should have in keeping with its active identity.

CHAPTER 9

Being as Universe

We have spoken of four properties of being: one, active, true, and good. Whether there are other properties of being that could be conceived as we have come to conceive these is debatable, depending on whether anyone can think of any more such properties of being precisely as being in its transcendental sense, which includes actual differences of being. With the four properties we do have, however, our first conception of being has developed considerably and can now be expressed in terms of a universe of being. Just as each property is a common mode of expressing being in its transcendental, so also the idea of the universe is a common mode of expressing being as a whole, that is, as a unity in its diversity. To see this we have only to keep the four properties of being clearly in mind.

In developing our first conception of being through the properties of being we have not sought to express being according to any of its differences or any of its special modes. We have not gone from our primary analogate of being, for example, to other kinds of being. We have focused only on the primary analogate, that is, on human being, while encompassing other beings in their analogy with this one. Given the differences of being as we acknowledge them in the analogy of being, the question arises as to how these differences relate to being in the light of the properties of being. Parmenides, who did not include any differences in his conception of being, still thought of it as some kind of whole that was round and without parts or motion of any kind. While including differences within our first conception of being, we do not abandon this idea of wholeness in being. In fact, our inclusion of differences enables us to speak of parts and motions in being and their coming together as universe through the different properties of being. How does this come about conceptually?

9.1 The Conception of the Universe through Unity in Difference

As we include differences in our first conception of being, we are led to a certain conception of nonidentity or dividedness in being. We then begin with unity as the first property of being, which is taken

as a certain undividedness in being or a negation of dividedness. We say: Every being is undivided in itself and divided from every other. From this comes the conception of many beings divided from one another. If we admit a plurality of beings, we can still think of being as one, but in a way that is much more complex and differentiated than Parmenides did. We can think of it as a universe of many and diverse things in some relation of unification. We can also think of each single thing as a whole with a differentiation of parts, as we have already suggested in speaking of being as one even when it is a complex whole.

To speak properly of the universe as a whole made up of many beings, however, we should keep a twofold understanding of division clearly in mind. First there is the understanding of division or nonidentity among a plurality and a diversity of beings, which entails some separation of one being from another. Then there is the understanding of division or nonidentity as it is found in a difference of parts within one and the same being as a complex whole. In general, "division" or nonidentity can mean either one of these two ways of differentiating, but more specifically it should be taken as the first way of differentiating, that is, as a matter of some separation of one being from another, as distinct from the second way, that is, as a distinguishing of constituent parts within a single whole being. As a specific term, "division" refers to the division of one being from another or the division between beings in the plural, each with an identity or a unity of its own. This is the way we shall use the term "division" in this discourse on being as universe. To keep the second understanding of division or nonidentity as applying within one and the same being clearly in mind, however, we shall speak of it only as "distinction" between different parts or constituent principles of one and the same being, not as one whole being divided from another whole being, but as constituent parts of one and the same being that are nevertheless distinct from one another in the sense that one "part" is not the other "part" while the two constitute one single being in its identity. This will be something especially important to keep in mind later on when we come to speak of the intrinsic structure of beings prior to speaking of the communication among them. The idea of distinction, as we shall use it, will not entail any idea of division in the specific sense mentioned here as between one being and another being, even when we come to speak of a *real distinction* between intrinsic principles within beings as we know them in experience or in the direct exercise of judgment.

In admitting division in being, that is, a plurality of beings, we do not abandon the idea of being as one. We only come to think of each

being, if there are many beings, as undivided in itself and divided from every other, and of different kinds of being as differently undivided in themselves and divided from others. All this is still to speak very generally of being in its oneness, but it does show how we come to think of oneness in being as a wholeness that is two-sided. On the one hand, we think of any being or each being as a composite of parts in its unity, so that oneness is not thought of as mere simplicity, which entails an absence of parts. In this sense being is not thought of as perfectly one in every case, but as a whole composed of parts. This allows for different degrees of identity or undividedness in different kinds of being.

On the other hand, the idea of these different degrees of identity or independence in different kinds of being gives rise at the same time to the idea of different degrees of interdependence among the different beings, which in turn gives rise to the idea of another kind of wholeness, a wholeness of many and different interdependent beings. Different degrees of independence among beings imply different degrees of dependence on one another, so that all, though many and diverse, are still thought of as one, that is, as a universe of beings rather than as one simple being.

Thus, through the idea of being as one in its differences, we are led to the idea of being as a universe or an allness of being. In positing a plurality or a diversity of beings, we do not stop at positing any one of them in some sort of independent isolation. We go on to see them all as relatively independent and as relatively or proportionately dependent on one another. If a being, as a composite of parts, is only relatively undivided in itself, it is also only relatively divided from every other. As only relatively independent, it is also relatively dependent. For each degree of being, the two, undividedness and di-videdness, are proportional to one another as they are to the degree of being.

The lower we go among the secondary analogates of being, the less we find of independence in being and the more we find of dependence on other beings. Similarly, the higher we go, the more we find of independence in being and the less we find of dependence on other beings. In either direction, however, we find a universe of beings in their interdependence. A unity of composition in the structure of limited being implies a correlative unity with other beings.

9.2 Action as Bond of the Universe

This dividedness and undividedness of beings, however, is not just a static juxtaposition of different beings in the universe. To speak of the universe only as an interdependence of beings or as a unity of differences in being is still too abstract. Seen in their plurality and diversity alone, beings are separate from one another. To understand them as universe we must also see them as coming together concretely through action and interaction. Without action and interaction, beings would only stand next to one another, so to speak, in a plurality and diversity, each with its own standing or identity in being according to what it is, but each left apart from every other in its own standing and identity. The unity of beings, or their order, would be purely abstract and quite incomplete as universe. To understand this order of beings in its concrete completion we must understand each being as active at the same time as undivided in itself, for it is through action that a being *comes together* with other beings.

If, as Aquinas argues, "we take away the actions of things, we take away the order of things to one another: for there is no gathering of things that are of diverse natures together into a unity of order except through the fact that some act and some are passive" (SG III, 69, 2447). To deny, therefore, that every being has its own proper action is not only to deny our proper understanding of being as active; it is also to deny that the universe can *come together* (*convenire*) as a unity of diverse beings. As Aquinas concludes, it is *in-conveniens*, that is, contrary to their *coming together*, not only in the loose sense that it is not fitting, but also in the more strict sense that the order of things in their diversity cannot be seen as truly one, that is, as a universe.

Being as universe is thus a coming together (*convenientia*) through action and interaction as well as an interdependence of many and diverse beings. Through its action every being is seeking its own completion as a being or what we have referred to as its second perfection. In a plurality and diversity of beings, however, beings seek this completion in interaction with other beings also seeking their own completion. Together they thus constitute a universe of beings that has its completion in the completion of all the particular beings.

To understand this idea of the universe in its *concrete* order, therefore, that is, in an order that has come or *grown together* (*concreta*) out of a diversity of beings, we must not only think of every being as active. We must also think of the action of every being as flowing from its being according to its first perfection in a way that is distinct from this first perfection or from what it is as a kind of being. In being active or passive a being is open to other beings and so can take them in, as it is taken in by them, each without losing its identity as a being. In this way each being, in seeking its own perfection, is at

the same time, by reason of the order of the universe, as Aquinas also maintains, seeking the perfection of the universe, which is common to all and the highest perfection of all things given in experience. By distinguishing the action of a being from what it is in its first perfection as a being, we are able to see how each being is maintained in its own identity and goodness even as a part of the common good of the universe.

We are thus led to distinguish two levels of goodness with regard to the universe as such, as we did for diverse beings as such. First, there is the level of first perfection or goodness, which is constituted by the totality of diverse beings conceived simply as being in actuality. This totality is already a perfection in the sense that it is the complete set of all that is, the *universitas re-rum*. It lacks nothing of what is, like being as such, or, to put it more positively, it includes all that is and it is already good and perfected *secundum quid* in respect to its being all that there is in actuality.

Over and above this first perfection, however, there is also a second perfection to be achieved through the self-actualization of the constituent parts. What this final good should consist in concretely will depend on the nature of the beings that constitute the universe and on how well they achieve the good they desire. But it is clear that it will be a common good, that is, a good common to all beings in their plurality and diversity, in the same way that being itself is common to all these beings in their different identities.

9.3 Human Being as Center of the Universe

In speaking of the analogy of degrees, or of diverse modes, in our first conception of being in its transcendental universality, we were led to focus on human being as our primary analogate. In order to arrive at the last two properties of being we distinguished, namely, truth and goodness, we had to focus once again on this same human being as that in which all things come together or as that which is open to all things as coming together in it. Truth and goodness are properties of being precisely in this relating of all being or beings to human being as both intelligence and appetite.

This does not mean in any way that truth and goodness, or being in its truth and goodness, are created by human being. The truth that is in human knowing is an effect of being, not a cause, while appetite itself in human being is an effect of being as good. Nor does it mean that human being is necessarily at the summit of being, or the

norm of all truth and goodness. Human being remains a mode of being among other modes, higher than some in the transcendental order of being, but also possibly lower than others in that same transcendental order.

However its place in such an order may be assessed ultimately, human being is the being around which our conception of being as given in experience is ordered. Human being, as far as we actually know, is the being in which being discloses itself as truth and to which it appeals as good. Being, or rather beings, come together as universe around this being. It is in relation to this being, our being, that we come to think of all diversely ordered being as a universe of truth and goodness.

Even if we come to think of higher beings than human beings, for whatever reason, we continue to think of human being not only as our primary analogate, but also as our center of being, because it is from this being that we reach out toward all being and around which we gather all being. This is the being that is somehow everything, as Aristotle said (*Soul* 431b19—20), in its being intelligent and sentient, relating thus to all intelligible and sensible being, and it is the being whose reaching out is of itself unlimited or infinite, whether below or above itself. In this reaching out, human being may be responding to an infinite being, which would then have to be a true summit of being other than human being or any other finite being, as we shall see when we come to raise the question of a summit of being. But even in this responding to a possibly infinite being, human being remains the center of the universe in our science of metaphysics as the being in which and to which the different degrees of being disclose themselves.

We think of ourselves as less limited in being than other beings, which we think of therefore as lower beings. And if we think of yet other beings as less limited than we are, we think of those as having a higher degree of being and therefore as more perfect in their actuality than we are in our human actuality. Such higher beings can still be thought of as finite, though they are relatively infinite in comparison to ourselves and other finite beings we know experientially, just as we are relatively infinite in comparison to lower and hence more finite beings than we humans are. In other words, such higher finite beings than ourselves would still be only parts of the same universe as we are along with lower material beings, and they would still only represent different degrees of being in relation to a universe that we would then have to think of as greater than the one we now have to think of in relation to experience, and ultimately as possibly relating to a highest or an absolutely infinite degree of being not known in experience.

In thinking all this, human being is itself somehow infinite or open to such higher infinity, so that it can still be the being around which the universe is ordered as known by us. It is the being that still understands itself as finite, nevertheless, in that it is not all being, so that it is limited by other beings to which it relates as lower or higher than itself, if not as equal to itself. It thinks of itself as part of a universe of being with a diversity and a plurality of beings and it thinks of this universe, such as it may be in all its fullness of diversity and plurality, as relating to itself. It belongs to the universe in its finitude, but the universe with its different degrees of perfection in being enters into it as in a being that is infinitely open to being.

9.4 Analogy and Homology in the Properties of Being

Just as the properties of being enable us to conceive being as universe, so also the idea of the universe enables us to understand what used to be referred to as the "convertibility of the properties of being with being itself." Such convertibility is not merely an interchangeability between being, on the one hand, and the one, the active, the true, or the good, on the other, because that would imply that one, active, true, and good are only synonyms of being. As we have seen, these are not synonyms of being. Nor is the distinction between them and being trivial or nugatory. They are different ideas that express our first conception of being according to its more common modes, as we saw with Aquinas at the beginning of our reflection on these properties of being. To say that a being is one, active, true, or good is not the same as to say that it is a being. These properties express something about being distinct from being as such, even though what they express is not outside of or really distinct from being itself. They are not merely interchangeable with being, therefore, but convertible with it in that whatever is said to *be* in some sense also has to be said to be *one*, *active*, *true*, and *good* in a corresponding sense. And conversely, as the idea of convertibility implies, whatever is thought of as one, active, true, or good also has to be thought of as being in a corresponding way. Every mode of being is illustrated in its own proper mode of unity, activity, truth, and goodness, while every mode of unity, activity, truth, and goodness illustrates a mode of being precisely as being.

To speak of being and its properties is thus a form of synthetic *a priori* judgment that opens the way to a metaphysical discourse about being as being, on the condition that we do not reduce any one of the properties to any category of being, as Kant did when he thought

of unity as coming under the category of quantity. As a transcendental concept, unity is not reducible to the one that is the principle of numbering. Beyond mere plurality, there is also diversity in which unity is also diversified according to different degrees of identity, such as the difference of active identity between the unity of a human being, that of a dog, that of a tree, or that of a stone. Similarly, activity is not reducible to that of a single kind of being but is diversified according to different degrees of being. Nor is truth reducible to that of one particular science, like that of physical science or mathematics, but it is diversified according to the entire range of being that is to be understood, including being itself in its transcendental analogy, an analogy that goodness itself follows according to the different degrees of perfection in being. This is the idea of the transcendentals that is lacking in Kant as well as in the modern philosophy that he was criticizing and which opens the way to a properly metaphysical discourse about being as being in its transcendentality.

To get this idea in all its fullness, however, we must keep in mind two lines of thought that have been converging in our reflection on these properties. First, we must understand the properties of being as analogous in the same way as being itself is *analogous*, in keeping with its differences. The same transcendentality holds for the properties as it does for the notion of being. If it did not, if any of the properties were univocal in any sense, as Kant's concept of unity is, then something could be predicated of being uni-vocally and being would no longer be thought of as analogous in the strict sense we have tried to signify. Like the concept of being itself, the concept of each property of being has to include the differences of unity, activity, truth, or goodness that are convertible with the differences of being according to the plurality and the diversity of beings in the universe.

At the same time, however, as we think of these differences in the properties of being, we must also think of the properties as proportionate to one another and to being for each degree of being, whether it be the degree of unity, activity, truth, or goodness. This is the second line of thought about properties that comes together with the thought of the analogy of differences in being. If we think of the differences as different levels of being, we must also think of each level as having the same level of unity, activity, truth, and goodness. If analogy represents a kind of vertical line in the transcendental order of differences in being, then horizontally, for each level of being, we must have a kind of *homology* among the properties and being itself. For each degree of being, we must say that there is a corresponding degree of unity, activity, truth, and goodness and, similarly, for each degree of any one of the properties, there is a corresponding degree of

being and of the other properties. Without this homology there would be no convertibility of the properties with being itself.

We have thus a principle of homology that goes with our principle of the analogy for each degree of being according to its differences. This principle will enable us to argue from the structure of a property such as the activity of a being to the ontological structure of the being itself. This principle will also enable us to think of being as good in different degrees, so that we think of different degrees of being as entailing different degrees of perfection. The universe is the totality of these different degrees of being and perfection that entails its own perfection as a totality or as an order of many and diverse beings.

9.5 The Perfection of the Universe

We have not begun to speak of being in any of its differences. We have been speaking only of the common and transcendental properties of being in its analogy. These properties, as we have said, express our first conception of being in a common way that is in keeping with *ens commune*, the subject of our consideration in metaphysics. To arrive at the concept of the universe, however, as distinct from our first conception of being, we have allowed for these differences of being and have thought of the totality of being as an order of beings in some kind of plurality and diversity.

In thinking of each being in its ontological constitution, we think of it not only as one, but also as active and hence as seeking its own final perfection through its own action. Inasmuch as we think of this final perfection as a second perfection achieved through a being's own self-actualization, we think of the being itself in its original ontological constitution as having a first perfection in its very identity as a being that has yet to achieve its second perfection. How does this translate into the thought of the universe as an order of many and diverse beings?

The universe first appears in experience as an interaction of many and diverse beings, that is, as an interaction of many and diverse beings seeking their own second perfection. As such a totality, the universe is understood as on the way to its second perfection through the action of its constituent parts. We cannot say that the universe, taken abstractly as a set of beings, is seeking its own second perfection, since it is not a being but an order or an ordering of beings. But if the second perfection or the good simply of some of its constituent parts, like the human being, can be identified with the good

of the universe as such, or if the good of the universe can be identified with the good of such constituent parts, then the perfection of the universe can also be thought of as having to be achieved through this process of self-actualization of its essential constituent parts.

In thinking of this final perfection of the universe through the self-actualizing interaction of the many and diverse beings as also a second perfection, we are then led to the thought of the universe as having its first perfection in its own ontological constitution or, more exactly, in the ontological constitution of its constituent parts. If we omit the thought of the passage from first to second perfection along with the thought of a plurality and diversity of constituent parts, we are left with Parmenides' thought of being as a totality that is unchanging and purely one. But if we include these two thoughts with our concept of being, as we have been trying to do, we come to the idea of a first perfection of the universe as the totality of all the beings that *are* in their plurality and diversity, the *universitas rerum* that is complete or perfect in that it includes all that is given in actuality, even though its second perfection is still to be achieved through the self-actualization of its parts.

Though it can be said, with Aristotle, that First Philosophy or the philosophy of being as being has to focus first on *ousia* or substance in its ontological constitution, this should not be interpreted as excluding the universe of substances in its totality. If we allow for the differences in the analogy of being, and even for a plurality and a diversity of beings in transition from first to second perfection, our question still concerns the whole of being, as it did with Parmenides. If, as we come to focus on differences as integral to our conception of being, we arrive at establishing a true plurality and diversity of being, as we shall try to do in examining the *structure* of being in Part Four, we shall then have to examine how they remain or become one as being, or how they *come together* as a universe of being, as we shall try to do in examining the communication of being in Part Five. It is the idea of being as universe, mediated by the properties of being, that opens the way to these next two parts of our metaphysical inquiry and ties them together as a reflection on being as being.



PART IV NATURAL THEOLOGY



Chapter 21. GOD IS

- a. Man can know God: natural and supernatural knowledge
- b. Natural theology as highest achievement of metaphysics
- c. Philosophy cannot ignore God
- d. Reason is led to God
- e. Reason not the only factor in our knowledge of God
- f. Agnosticism is unreasonable
- g. Importance of the rational demonstration of God's existence
- h. Limits of the human knowledge of God
- i. The problem of atheism
- j. The principle of immanence

Chapter 22. WAYS OF DEMONSTRATING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

- a. Elucidation of terms
- b. The first way: motion
- c. The second way: activity
- d. The third way: generation and corruption
- e. The fourth way: perfection (a summary of metaphysics)
- f. The fifth way: order and intelligency

Chapter 23. GOD IS IPSUM ESSE SUBSISTENS

- a. The essence of God
- b. The simplicity of God
- c. The transcendence of God
- d. The supreme goodness of God
- e. How God should be loved
- f. Immensity, immutability, eternity

Chapter 24. DIVINE OPERATION

- a. God is personal
- b. Divine knowledge
- c. Divine will: God is love
- d. Divine omnipotence
- e. God as creator
- f. God's presence everywhere
- g. Divine freedom and providence



PART V METAPHYSICS OF MAN



Chapter 25. INTRODUCTION

- a. Recapitulation: metaphysics as comprehensive knowledge
- b. Object of the metaphysics of man
- c. Spirit and matter: social sciences and physical sciences
- d. Order and method of this study
- e. Man as spiritual and corporeal creature
- f. Human activity

Chapter 26. INTELLIGENCE

- a. Overview
- b. Nature and object of the intelligence
- c. Process of understanding

Chapter 27. SIMPLE APPREHENSION

- a. Understanding begins in the senses
- b. Abstraction: from the sensible to the intelligible
- c. Impression of the intelligible form on the intellect
- d. The act of understanding
- e. Characteristics of human concepts
- f. Knowledge of the singular

Chapter 28. JUDGMENT

- a. The operation of judging
- b. Judgment and truth
- c. Certainty and belief
- d. Discursive process of reasoning
- e. Self-knowledge, consciousness and reflection
- f. Conclusion: knowledge as enrichment of being

Chapter 29. THE WILL

- a. Nature and object of the will. The emotions
- b. The good of man
- c. The will and the last end
- d. Natural inclination of the will as distinct from actual choice
- e. Will and intelligence
- f. Causality of the act of the will
- g. The will and human behavior

Chapter 30. FREEDOM

- a. What is freedom
- b. Inner freedom and exterior freedom
- c. Freedom of choice: determinism
- d. The root of the freedom of man
- e. Freedom and necessity
- f. Freedom and the good
- g. Free volition of evil

Chapter 31. THE HUMAN SOUL

- a. Spirituality of the human soul
- b. The soul as substantial form of the body: no reincarnation
- c. The spiritual perfection of man
- d. Origin of the human soul
- e. Immortality of the human soul

Chapter 32. THE PERSON AND HUMAN NATURE

- a. Nature as individuated
- b. Person and personality
- c. The place of the person in the universe

Chapter 33. MAN IN THE WORLD

- a. The social nature of man
- b. Natural societies
- c. Man and history
- d. Human work
- e. The sanctification of work

f. Participation in divine action

Appendix: CATHOLIC DOCTRINE ABOUT MAN



PART VI ETHICS



Chapter 34. INTRODUCTION

- a. Metaphysics of the end and of the moral order
- b. Free actions
- c. Ethics as part of metaphysics
- d. Ethical science and moral uprightness
- e. Order of this study

Chapter 35. GOOD AND EVIL

- a. The good
- b. Participated beings have a good end or purpose
- c. The final good moves beings
- d. Evil as privation
- e. Evil as “deordination”
- f. Evil and freedom
- g. Evil as such can neither move nor motivate
- h. Physical evil
- i. It is impossible for God to be the cause of evil

Chapter 36. THE LAST END

- a. Existence of a last end
- b. Identification of the last end
- c. Natural last end and supernatural last end
- d. Possession of the last end: happiness

Chapter 37. THE COMMON GOOD

- a. Proper good and common good
- b. The common good of mankind
- c. Love with order
- d. The false philosophies

- e. Ordination of beings to the common good
- f. The common good shared in the order of the universe
- g. Ordination of each single substance to the common good
- h. Direct ordination of spiritual beings to the common good

Chapter 38. MORAL LAW AND CONSCIENCE

- a. Eternal law and moral law
- b. Characteristics of the natural law
- c. Knowledge of the natural law
- d. Content of the natural law
- e. Moral sanction
- f. Conscience
- g. Principles guiding conscience

Chapter 39. MORAL ACTS

- a. Will and freedom
- b. Goodness and malice of human acts
- c. Moral evil or sin
- d. Types of sins
- e. Effects of sin
- f. Virtues
- g. Types of virtues

Chapter 40. SOCIETY AND THE COMMON GOOD

- a. Interrelations among men
- b. Friendship and the love of God
- c. What is society?
- d. History and culture
- e. Ordering of intermediate societies to civil society
- f. Ordering of the person to the common good of society
- g. Peace and war

Chapter 41. THE FAMILY

- a. The nature of marriage
- b. The common good of the family

- c. Fundamental properties of marriage
- d. Marriage and celibacy

Chapter 42. GOVERNMENT, AUTHORITY AND LAWS

- a. Government and politics
- b. Authority and obedience
- c. Positive law

Chapter 43. RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

- a. Nature of the juridical order: the juridical mind
- b. Rights and duties
- c. Private property

CHAPTER 41

The Family

a. The nature of marriage

The most basic community in civil society is the family (cf. [ch. 33, c](#)): the natural school for citizenry, where everyone can learn to love the common good in the right order, i.e. love of God and love of neighbor.

How is the family constituted? Let us look at the *causes* of it (metaphysical analysis). What brings the family together? The *efficient causes* that make a family are *a man and a woman brought together by their mutual love*. But, as we know (cf. [ch. 18, f](#)), the efficient cause does not act without an end or *final cause*. And what is the end or purpose of the union of husband and wife? The primary end (*finis operis*: see [ch. 39, b](#)) of this union is the *procreation and education of children*: without the education or upbringing of the children as an end, it would be like animal-mating. A temporary union would not guarantee this upbringing, and therefore the union has to be *for life*.

The *material causes* of marriage are the bodies of the spouses as originators of human life. They give themselves to each other and thereby acquire a *right* to each other's body: they no longer belong to themselves, so to speak, but to each other. And the *formal cause*, or what makes the union a marriage, is the *mutual consent* to accept each other as husband and wife, outwardly and publicly manifested, and made for life.

As we said, the family is a “natural” society, since it is natural for men and women to be attached to each other. The purpose of the family is the propagation of the human species: this is a “common” good “proper” to human nature (cf. [ch. 37, a](#)). As such, therefore, it is a *natural institution* common to all peoples regardless of religion or culture, and God is the Author of it as Creator of human nature. However, as Christians we know that God has raised this natural institution to the dignity of a *sacrament*, i.e. a means of communicating divine life.

Since it is a *human* society, what brings it about, as we have seen, is a *spiritual* act, namely a deliberate act of the will what is consummated by the union of the bodies is what they have already brought about by their mutual acceptance. By being raised to a sacrament for Christians, and since grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, all the *natural* elements of marriage remain in the Christian

marriage: all the properties and laws of marriage are valid *for all men*, not just for Christians.

In order to understand the nature of marriage, it is useful to look at the difference between men and animals: to see what is distinctive in man. We observe that animals also have sexual union for the generation of their offspring. There must be something, therefore, that makes the difference in the case of man, which is not precisely the sexual union but something of a spiritual nature. That is why the purpose of marriage is not only the begetting and bodily survival of the offspring (this applies to animals too), but the complete *education* or upbringing of the children *towards virtue*, whereby they can reach God as Last End. This is then the true purpose of marriage, and the efficient cause of marriage cannot be motivated by the passion engendered by physical attraction, because this is what is proper to animals. It is also natural for men and women to feel a physical attraction, although this cannot be the cause of marriage: it has to be a *free choice* in order for it to be *human* (reason and will have to enter into it).

The *properties* of the family or “domestic society” are therefore: (i) *unity*, i.e. one man and one woman; and (ii) *indissolubility*; both of which are *spiritual* goods or values, not to be found in animals, as they have no sense of permanence and their sexual unions do not go beyond mere mating. Thus, in the *spiritual* differences we observe in marriage as compared with animal mating, man achieves the transmission of physical life as ennobled by reason of his spiritual nature. And we can see why if marriage is not lived in this spiritual context, but only as mere animal mating, it makes those who fall into this degradation become like animals. There is probably nothing that brutalizes man more than using sex outside the context of marriage. To the extent that materialism prevails, there is a tendency to *reduce* married love to sex, i.e. to the aspects of generation only and to a kind of sex *for its own sake*, since it is not open to the transmission of life. But this injures the very specific common good of marriage, which, as we have seen, is *for the sake of human life*.

b. The common good of the family

The begetting *and* upbringing of children is specific to the human species. It happens sometimes, however, that no children are born, with no fault on the part of the spouses. To be more precise, therefore, we have to distinguish the *primary* from the *secondary* purpose of marriage. Thus far we have spoken of the “primary” one (begetting and upbringing of children); but the “secondary” purpose

comprises all the other ends which can and should be achieved by marriage, but all subordinated to the primary one. These secondary ends can be summarized as the *mutual help and companionship* between husband and wife. But the primary purpose is what marriage is essentially for. Now, companionship and mutual help can be achieved outside marriage, e.g. in the relationship between brothers and sisters; but since the begetting and upbringing of children can be achieved only in marriage, this must be the primary purpose.

Therefore, all the good of domestic society, of all the actions of the family, depends on their ordination to the real common good of the family, which is the *good of the offspring*. Thus, in all decisions of husband and wife the first consideration must always be the good of the children, e.g. when deciding whether or not to emigrate. And the mutual love and friendship of husband and wife must be for the sake of the children: otherwise it will not be a right love and friendship. This is why every sexual act which is deliberately deprived of its function of generation goes directly against the common good of the family, and is therefore intrinsically evil.

Lastly, due to this common good of the family, which is the children, the human species, is propagated with order only within marriage, because only within marriage can they be properly brought up and be ordained to the common good of society.

c. Fundamental properties of marriage

The *unity* and *indissolubility* of marriage, which we have: already mentioned, flow as properties from the common good of the family (the good of the children). Thus belonging to the *natural law*, they are valid for *all* men regardless of religion or culture (although they have been confirmed by the divine-positive Law of God): they are not peculiar to the “sacrament of marriage” (for Christians) but belong also to the *natural contract* common to all peoples.

(i) *Indissolubility*. Here the good of the offspring is the first consideration: a “dissoluble” marriage would threaten it, by jeopardizing the education of the children. But even when the children have grown up and no longer need education the good of marriage would be in danger by the damage to the relationship of filiation and parenthood, which is one of the deepest relationships among men.

The second consideration is the matter of *justice*: the rights acquired in marriage would be injured by the dissolution of the contract.

The third consideration is the unique *friendship* that exists in

marriage, whose sign is the spontaneous feeling that married love is *exclusive* and *forever*, enshrined in all folklores and literatures as one more manifestation of what is permanent in human nature. It has always and everywhere been felt that while indissolubility and marital fidelity are *values* (goods), divorce and marital infidelity are *counter values* (evils), and it is values that should animate and guide cultures, institutions and laws, in order to pursue the common good.

Fourthly, by knowing that they are united inseparably, husband and wife love each other *more faithfully, consciously and willingly*, and this helps them to take better care of domestic matters and feel more responsible for the household, which would be endangered by the sense of insecurity and the lack of mutual trust deriving from the possibility of dissolving the marriage bond.

(ii) *Unity*. This means that it is exclusive, i.e. of one with one: the matrimonial bond excludes polygamy. Here again the first consideration is the good of the children: for their education, they need the *complementarity* of father and mother, the head and the heart, so to speak, of the family (children need both affection and discipline). As the family is a society, it needs a government, which corresponds naturally to the parents in relation to the children: they complement each other in this task, and this partnership would be upset by a third or fourth party.

Besides, polygamy degrades the woman who has to share a man with other women: it makes the female sex inferior in practice (which is contrary to the essential equality of the sexes), and is a source of enmity and strife.

Notwithstanding the deluge of rationalizing on this score throughout the centuries, divorce and polygamy remain the social plagues always threatening or undermining civilizations.

d. Marriage and celibacy

It is clear that the attraction between men and women and their union in families is *natural*: marriage is necessary for the survival of the human *species*. It does not, however, follow that it is necessary for *every individual*. It is necessary for men to cultivate the land, for example, in order to produce food, but it is not necessary for *all* to be farmers.

As a matter of fact, if the common good can be served and pursued *directly*, without the mediation of marriage (a human love that should lead to God), or, if perpetual celibacy is for the sake of God (the Common Good transcending society), it is in itself a more excellent way than marriage (cf. [ch. 32, c](#), and [37, h](#)) (cf. Mt. 19:10-12).

Physical parenthood, however noble it may be, is not the greatest perfection of man, since it corresponds to his material part. To be sure, human generation is the highest type *of becoming* proper to corruptible beings. Spiritual substances are generated, though not materially: they are directly created by God (cf. [ch. 31, d](#)). When man generates, he transmits only a body, because the soul is directly created by God (this is why it is so evil to deprive the conjugal act of its natural end, as it amounts to preventing God from creating a human soul).

This means that there is such a thing as *spiritual parenthood*, which is not a generation in the material sense. It is a well-known fact in the Christian context: “I have begotten you”, writes St. Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15). The first point in the chapter on the Glory of God in Escrivá's *The Way* mentions it: “... Many deprive themselves of children for the sake of his glory, and they have thousands of children of their spirit...” (no. 779).

This celibacy for the sake of God makes the love of God in the celibate person *exclusive*, like the love in marriage between husband and wife, with an undividedness superior to that of marriage, since it is more related to God. Since the human will is spiritual, to make it exclusive for the love of God is something superior (as long as this love is total and undivided, as well as orderly: cf. [ch. 23, d](#) and [e](#); [37, c](#), and [40, b](#)), and this superiority is naturally prolonged into the other life, if the Last End is reached.



PART VII HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



Chapter 44. INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

- a. Philosophy as instrument of theology
- b. Overview of the History of philosophy

Chapter 45. THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

- a. The historical setting of Christianity
- b. Plato (427-348 B.C.)
- c. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)
- d. Neo-Platonism

Chapter 46. THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

- a. There is a Christian philosophy
- b. The formation of Christian philosophy
- c. The contents of Christian philosophy
- d. St. Augustine (354-430)
- e. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
- f. Decadence after St. Thomas

Chapter 47. THE HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

- a. The Modernity movement
- b. Humanism
- c. Modern philosophy and the Church
- d. René Descartes (1596-1650)
- e. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Chapter 48. CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

- a. Overall view
- b. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)
- c. Marxism
- d. Other kinds of materialism

e. Existentialism

Epilogue

“The doctrines of those illustrious men (Fathers and Doctors of the Church), like the scattered members of a body, Thomas collected together and cemented, distributed in wonderful order, and so increased with important additions that he is rightly and deservedly esteemed the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic faith...

“Philosophy has no part which he did not touch finely at once and thoroughly; on the laws of reasoning, on God and incorporeal substances, on man and other sensible things, on human actions and their principles, he reasoned in such a manner that in him there is wanting neither a full array of questions, nor an apt disposal of the various parts, nor the best method of proceeding, nor soundness of principles or strength of argument, nor clearness and elegance of style, nor a facility for explaining what is abstruse...

“Again, clearly distinguishing, as is fitting, reason from faith, while happily associating the one with the other, he both preserved the rights and had regard for the dignity of each; so much so, indeed, that reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason than those which she has already obtained through Thomas.”

Thus, Leo XIII in the memorable encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, whose centennial we have celebrated in 1979.

As stated in the Foreword, the author's intention throughout this book, has been to offer the reader a modest introduction to that philosophy of Thomas, both as a tonic for the intellect, whether Christian or not, and as a light to probe deeper into the doctrine and age-long wisdom of the Catholic Church, and thus improve our lives, so that they can truly be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (cf. Mt. 5:13-16).

We have purposely avoided, on the one hand, the academic question (formulated by Heidegger and Jaspers, among others) of whether a “Christian” philosophy is possible (they radically split reason and faith, in the old Lutheran and Gnostic tradition), and, on the other, the no less academic question, compounded by factional rivalries, as to the meaning of the Church advocacy of the doctrine of Aquinas,

Our preference has rather been to *actually expound* that philosophy, in as simple as possible terms, so as to both show that it *is* indeed a *philosophy*, i.e. a pursuit of wisdom open to any human being, regardless of his culture or religion, although it happens to be *Christian* in its inspiration, motivation and setting; and demonstrate in a practical way why the Church strongly advises all her children to *know*

it and to *be guided* by it.

That this book may serve the above purpose I entrust to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Seat of Wisdom, and of the Angelic Doctor.

Appendix

**L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO December 17,
1979**

Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas for the youth of our times [1]

POPE JOHN PAUL'S ADDRESS AT THE ANGELICUM UNIVERSITY

On Saturday, 17 November, John Paul II returned as Pope to his Alma Mater, the "Angelicum", where he had been a student from 1946-1948. He went there to speak at the conclusion of an international congress, organized by the International Society of St. Thomas Aquinas, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical "Aeterni Patris".

Among those present were Cardinals Parente, Ciappi, Philippe, Knox and Garrone. After an address of homage by Father Vincent de Couesnongle, Master of the Dominican Order, the Holy Father spoke as follows:

Esteemed Professors and very dear Students!

1. It is with a feeling of deep joy that I find myself once more, after no short space of time, in this hall. It is well known to me because I entered it so many times as a student in the years of my youth when I also came from far away to the Pontifical Athenaeum "Angelicum" to deepen my knowledge of the teaching of the Common Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin.

Since then the Athenaeum has grown significantly. It has been raised to the rank of a Pontifical University by my venerated predecessor, Pope John XXIII; it has been enriched by two new Institutes: to the already existing Faculties of Theology, Canon Law and Philosophy there have been added those of Social Sciences and the Institute "Mater Ecclesiae" which has the aim of preparing future "Teachers of the Religious Sciences". I take note with pleasure of these signs of vitality in the old stock which shows that fresh streams of sap flow through it. Thanks to these it can satisfy, through its new scientific institutions, the cultural needs as they gradually show

themselves.

The joy of today's encounter is notably increased by the presence of a select group of learned exponents of Thomistic thought who have come here from many places to celebrate the first centenary of the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, published on the fourth of August 1879 by the great Pontiff Leo XIII. This gathering, promoted by the "International Society of St. Thomas of Aquin" links up ideally with that held recently near Cordoba in Argentina, on the initiative of the Catholic Argentinian Association of Philosophy, in order to commemorate the same event by inviting leading representatives of present-day Christian thought to exchange views on the theme: "The Philosophy of the Christian Today." This present meeting, more directly concerned with the figure and the work of St. Thomas, while doing honour to this celebrated Roman centre of Thomistic studies where one can say that Aquinas lives "as in his own home," is an act of recognition due to the immortal Pontiff who played so great a part in reviving interest in the philosophical and theological work of the Angelic Doctor.

2. I would like, therefore, to extend my respectful and cordial greeting to those who have organized this meeting: in the first place to you, Reverend Father Vincent de Couesnongle, Master of the Dominican Order and President of the "International Society of St. Thomas of Aquin"; with you I greet also the Rector of this Pontifical University, Reverend Father Joseph Salguero, the distinguished members of the Academic Staff, and all those speakers, noted for their competence in Thomistic studies, who have honoured this meeting with their presence and enlivened its sessions by sharing their store of knowledge.

I would also like to offer my affectionate greetings to you, students of this University, who give yourselves, with eager generosity, to the study of philosophy and theology as well as of the other useful auxiliary sciences, taking as your guide St. Thomas to whose thought you are introduced by the enlightened and earnest efforts of your professors. The youthful enthusiasm with which you approach Aquinas with the questions which your sensitivity towards the problems of the modern world suggest to you, and the impression of luminous clarity which you gain from the answers which he gives to you in his own clear, calm and sober way, afford the most convincing proof of the inspired wisdom which moved Pope Leo XIII to promulgate the Encyclical whose centenary we are celebrating this year.

3. It cannot be doubted that the chief aim which the great Pontiff had in mind in taking that step of historic importance was to take up again and to develop the teaching of the First Vatican Council on the relations between faith and reason. As Bishop of Perugia he

had played a most active role in that Council. In the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, in fact, the Conciliar Fathers had given special attention to this theme of burning actuality. When treating of "faith and reason" they were united in opposing those philosophical and theological trends which had been infected by the then rampant rationalism. Taking their stand on Divine Revelation, as passed on and faithfully interpreted by preceding Ecumenical Councils, as clarified and defended by the Holy Fathers and Doctors of both East and West, they had declared that faith and reason, far from being opposed, could and should meet in a friendly way (cf. *Ench. Symb.* DS: 3015-3020; 3041-3043).

The persistent and violent attacks of those who were hostile to the Catholic faith and to right reason induced Leo XIII to re-affirm and to develop the teaching of Vatican I in his Encyclical. Here, having recalled the gradual and ever growing contribution made by the leading lights of the Church, both in the East and in the West, to the defence and progress of philosophical and theological thought, the Pope turns to what St. Thomas did by way of deep penetration and of synthesis. In words which should be quoted in their flowing classical Latin he has no hesitation in pointing to the Angelic Doctor as the one who carried rational research into what faith makes known towards results which have proved to be of lasting value: "Thomas gathered their doctrines together — they had long lain dispersed like the scattered limbs of a body — and knitted them into one whole. He disposed them in marvellous order and increased them to such an extent that he is rightly and deservedly considered the pre-eminent guardian and glory of the Catholic Church. . . Again, beginning by establishing as is only right, the distinction between reason and faith, while still linking each to the other in a bond of friendly harmony, he maintained the legitimate rights of both, and preserved their respective dignities in such a way that human reason soared to the loftiest heights on the wings of Thomas and can scarcely rise any higher, while faith can expect no further or more reliable assistance than such as it has already received from Thomas" (*Leonis XIII, Acta*, vol. I, pp. 274-275; English translation, J.F. Scanlan, in: *Sf. Thomas Aquinas, Angel of the Schools*, by J. Maritain, London, 1933, Appendix I, pp. 204-206).

3. Statements as weighty as these call to commitment. To us, heeding them a century later, they above all offer practical or pedagogical guidance; for, in so speaking, Leo XIII wanted to set before teachers and students of philosophy and theology the highest ideal of a Christian dedicated to research.

Well then, what are the qualities which won for Aquinas such titles as: "Doctor of the Church," and "Angelic Doctor," awarded him by

St. Pius V; "Heavenly Patron of the Highest Studies," conferred by Leo XIII in the Apostolic Letter *Cum hoc sit* of 4 August 1880, that is, on the first anniversary of the Encyclical we are celebrating (cf. *Leonis XIII, Acta*, vol. II, pp. 108-113)?

The first quality is without doubt his complete submission of mind and heart to divine Revelation, one which he renewed on his death-bed, in the Abbey of Fossanova, on the seventh of March 1274. How beneficial it would be for the Church of God if also today all Catholic philosophers and theologians followed the wonderful example of the "Doctor communis Ecclesiae"! Aquinas treated the Holy Fathers and Doctors with the same reverence, in so far as they bear common witness to the revealed Word, so much so that Cardinal Cajetan did not hesitate to write — and his words are quoted in the Encyclical: "St. Thomas, because he had the utmost reverence for the Doctors of antiquity, seems to have inherited in a way the intellect of all" (*In Sum. Theol.* II-II, q. 148, a. 4 c; *Leonis XIII, Acta*, vol. I, p. 273; Scanlan, loc. dt., p. 204).

The second quality, one which has to do with his excellence as a teacher, is that he had a great respect for the visible world because it is the work, and hence also the imprint and image, of God the Creator. Those therefore who sought to accuse St. Thomas of naturalism and empiricism were mistaken. "The Angelic Doctor", we read in the Encyclical, "considered philosophical conclusions in the reasons and principles of things, which, as they are infinite in extent, so also contain the seeds of almost infinite truths for succeeding masters to cultivate in the appropriate season and bring forth an abundant harvest of truth" (*Leonis XIII, Acta*, vol. I, p. 273; Scanlan, p. 205).

Lastly, the third quality which moved Leo XIII to offer Aquinas to professors and students as a model of "the highest studies" is his sincere, total and life-long acceptance of the Teaching Office of the Church, to whose judgment he submitted all his works both during his life and at the point of death. Who does not recall the moving profession of faith which he wished to make in that cell at Fossanova as he knelt before the Blessed Eucharist before receiving it as his Viaticum of eternal life! "The works of the Angelic Doctor", writes Leo XIII once more, "contain the doctrine which is most in conformity with what the Church teaches" (*ibid.*, p. 280). His writings make it clear that this reverential assent was not confined only to the solemn and infallible teaching of the Councils and of the Supreme Pontiffs. An attitude, as truly edifying as this, deserves to be imitated by all who wish to be guided by the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (n. 25).

4. These three qualities mark the entire speculative effort of St. Thomas and make sure that its results are orthodox. It is for this

reason that Pope Leo XIII, wishing to treat "of the method of teaching philosophical studies in such a way as shall most duly correspond with the blessing of faith and be consonant with the respect due to the human sciences themselves" (*Leonis XIII, Acta*, vol. I, p. 256; Scanlan, p. 190), looked principally to St. Thomas as "leader and master of all the Doctors of the Schools" (*ibid.*, p. 272).

The immortal Pontiff recalled that the method, the principles and the teaching of Aquinas had, down the centuries, been especially favoured not only by learned men but by the supreme teaching authority of the Church (cf. *Encycl. Aeterni Patris*, loc. cit., pp. 274-277). If today also, he insisted, philosophical and theological reflection is not to rest on an "unstable foundation" which would make it "wavering and superficial" (*ibid.*, p. 278), it will have to draw inspiration from the "golden wisdom" of St. Thomas in order to draw from it the light and vigour it needs to enter deeply into the meaning of what is revealed and to further the due progress of scientific endeavour (cf. *ibid.*, p. 282).

Now that a hundred years of the history of thought have passed we are able to appreciate how balanced and wise these appraisals were. With good reason, therefore, the Supreme Pontiffs who succeeded Leo XIII, and the Code of Canon Law itself (cf. can. 1366, par. 2) have repeated them and made them their own. The Second Vatican Council also, as we know, recommends the study and the teaching of the perennial philosophical heritage, of which the thought of the Angelic Doctor forms a notable part. (In this connection I would like to recall that Paul VI wanted an invitation to attend the Council to be sent to Jacques Maritain, one of the best known interpreters of Thomistic thought, intending also in this way to signify his high regard for the Master of the Thirteenth Century and for a way of "doing philosophy" that is in keeping with the "signs of the times"). The Decree on priestly formation (*Optatam Totius*), before it speaks of the need for teaching to take account of modern trends in philosophy, especially of "those which are most influential in the homeland of the candidates," requires that "philosophical subjects should be taught in such a way as to lead the students gradually to a solid and consistent knowledge of man, the world and God. The students should rely on that philosophical patrimony which is forever valid" (n. 15; *Vatican Council II*, ed. A. Flannery, O.P., Dublin, 1975, p. 718). In the Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*) we read: "By a careful attention to the current problems of these changing times and to the research being undertaken, the convergence of faith and reason in the one truth may be seen more clearly. This method follows the tradition of the doctors of the Church and especially St. Thomas Aquinas" (n. 10; Flannery, p. 735). The words of the Council

are clear: the Fathers saw that it is fundamental for the adequate formation of the clergy and of Christian youth that it preserve a close link with the cultural heritage of the past, and in particular with the thought of St. Thomas; and that this, in the long run, is a necessary condition for the longed-for renewal of the Church.

There is no need for me to reaffirm here my intention to carry out fully what the Council has laid down, since I made this quite clear already in the homily which I delivered on 17 October 1978, shortly after my election to the Chair of Peter (cf. AAS, 70,1978, pp. 921-923) and several times afterwards.

5. I am very pleased, then, to find myself this evening among you, who fill the halls of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas, drawn by his philosophical and theological teaching, just as great numbers of students from various nations surrounded the chair of the Dominican friar in the thirteenth century when he taught in the universities of Paris or of Naples or in the "Studium Curiae", or in the House of Studies of the Priory of Santa Sabina in Rome.

The philosophy of St. Thomas deserves to be attentively studied and accepted with convictions by the youth of our day by reason of its spirit of *openness* and of universalism, characteristics which are hard to find in many trends of contemporary thought. What is meant is an *openness* to the whole of reality in all its parts and dimensions, without either reducing reality or confining thought to particular forms or aspects (and without turning singular aspects into absolutes), as intelligence demands in the name of objective and integral truth about what is real. Such *openness* is also a significant and distinctive mark of the Christian faith, whose specific countermark is its catholicity. The basis and source of this openness lie in the fact, that the philosophy of St. Thomas is a philosophy of *being*, that is, of the "act of existing" (*actus essendi*) (1) whose transcendental value paves the most direct way to rise to the knowledge of subsisting Being and pure Act, namely to God. On account of this we can even call this philosophy: the philosophy of the proclamation of being, a chant in praise of what exists.

It is from this proclamation of being that the philosophy of St. Thomas derives its ability to grasp and to "affirm" all that shows itself to the human intellect (what is given by experience, in the widest sense) as a determinate existing being in all the inexhaustible richness of its content; that it derives its ability, in particular, to grasp and to "affirm" that "being" which is able to know itself, to be filled with wonder in itself, and above all to decide for itself and to fashion its own unrepeatable history. . . . St. Thomas is thinking of this "being" and of its dignity when he speaks of man as that which is "the most perfect thing in the whole of nature" (*perfectissimum in tota natura*: S. Th. I, q. 29, a.

3) a "person", requiring that it must be given exceptional and specific attention. This says all that is essential with regard to the dignity of the human being, even though much more still remains to be investigated in this field, one where the contribution of modern trends of philosophy can be helpful.

It is also from this affirmation of being that the philosophy of St. Thomas draws its power to justify itself from the methodological point of view, as a branch of knowledge that cannot be reduced to any other science whatever, and as one that transcends them all by establishing itself as independent of them and at the same time as bringing them to completion in regard to their true nature.

Moreover, it is by reason of this affirmation of being that the philosophy of St. Thomas is able to, and indeed must, go beyond all that presents itself directly in knowledge as an existing thing (given through experience) in order to reach "that which subsists as sheer Existing" (*ipsum Esse subsistens*) and also creative Love; for it is this which provides the ultimate (and therefore necessary) explanation of the fact that "it is preferable to be than not to be" (*potius est esse quam non esse*) and, in particular, of the fact that we exist. "This existing itself", Aquinas tells us, "is the most common effect of all, prior and more intimate than any other effect; that is why such an effect is due to a power that, of itself, belongs to God alone" (*Ipsium enim esse est communissimus effectus, primus et intimior omnibus aliis effectibus; et ideo soli Deo competit secundum virtutem propriam talis effectus: QQ. DD. De Potentia, q. 3, a. 7, c.*)

St. Thomas puts philosophy moving along lines set by this intuition, showing at the same time that only in this way does the intellect feel at ease (as it were "at home") and therefore it can never abandon this way without abandoning itself.

By maintaining that the proper object of metaphysics is reality "in so far as it is being" (*sub ratione entis*) St. Thomas pointed to that analogy which accompanies being as such, finding there the justification of the method for forming propositions dealing with the whole of reality and with the Absolute itself. In so far as methodology is concerned it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this discovery for philosophical research, as indeed also for human knowledge in general.

There is no need to stress the debt owed to this philosophy by theology itself, since it is nothing other than "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*) or the "understanding of faith" (*intellectus fidei*). Not even theology, then, can abandon the philosophy of St. Thomas.

6. Is it to be feared that by favouring the philosophy of St. Thomas one will undermine the right to exist that is enjoyed by

different cultures or hinder the progress of human thought? Such a fear would dearly be groundless because the methodological principle invoked above implies that whatever is real has its source in the "act of existing" (*actus essendi*); (1) and because the perennial philosophy, by reason of that principle, can claim in advance, so to speak, all that is true in regard to reality. By the same token, every understanding of reality — which does in fact correspond to reality — has every right to be accepted by the "philosophy of being," no matter who is to be credited with such progress in understanding or to what philosophical school that person belongs. Hence, the other trends in philosophy, if regarded from this point of view, can and indeed should be treated as natural allies of the philosophy of St. Thomas, and as *partners* worthy of attention and respect in the dialogue that is carried on in the presence of reality. This is needed if truth is to be more than partial or one-sided. That is why the advice given by St. Thomas to his followers in his "Letter on how to study" where he said: "look rather to what was said than to who it was that said it" (*Ne respicias a quo sed quod dicitur*), is so much in keeping with the spirit of his philosophy. That is also why I am so pleased that the programme of studies in the Faculty of Philosophy in this University offers, besides the theoretical courses dealing with the thought of Aristotle and of St. Thomas, other courses such as: Science and Philosophy, Philosophical Anthropology, Physics and Philosophy, History of Modern Philosophy, the Phenomenological Movement, as required by the recent Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* for Universities and Ecclesiastical Faculties (AAS 71, 1979, pp. 495-496).

7. There is still one more reason why the philosophy of St. Thomas has enduring value: its prevailing characteristic is that it is always in search of the truth. In his commentary on Aristotle, his favourite philosopher, he writes: "Philosophy is not studied in order to find out what people may have thought but in order to discover what is true" (*De Coelo et Mundo*, I, lect. 22; ed. R. Spiazzi, n. 228; "*Sudium philosophiae non est ad hoc quod sciatur quid homines senserint, sed qualiter se habeat veritas*"). The reason why the philosophy of St. Thomas is pre-eminent is to be found in its realism and its objectivity: it is a philosophy "of what is, not of what appears," (*de l'etre et non du paraître*). What makes the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor so wonderfully apt to be the "handmaid of faith" (*ancilla fidei*) is that it has gained possession of truths of the natural order, which have their origin in God the Creator, just as truths of the divine order have their source in God as revealing.

This does not lessen the value of philosophy or unduly restrict its field of research; on the contrary, it allows it to develop in ways that human reason alone could not have discovered. Hence the Supreme

Pontiff Pius XI of holy memory, issuing the Encyclical *Studiorum Ducem* on the occasion of the Sixth Centenary of the Canonization of St. Thomas, did not hesitate to declare: "In honouring St. Thomas something greater is involved than the reputation of St. Thomas, and that is the authority of the teaching Church" (*In Thoma honorando maius quiddam quam Thomae ipsius existimatio vertitur, id est Ecclesiae docentis auctoritas*; AAS 15; 1923, p. 324; English trans. Scanlan. loc. cit., p. 238).

8. St. Thomas, because his "reason was enlightened by faith" (Vatican Council I. Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 4: DS. 3016), was in fact able to throw light also on problems concerning the Incarnate Word, "Saviour of all men" (Prologue to Part III of the *Summa Theologiae*). These are the problems to which I referred in my first Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, in which I spoke about Christ as "Redeemer of man and of the world, centre of the universe and of history. . . the chief way for the Church" for our return "to the Father's house" (nn. 1, 8, 13). This is a theme of the highest importance for the life of the Church and for Christian science. Is not Christology perhaps the basis and the first condition for working out a more complete anthropology such as is required by the needs of our day? We must not forget that, in fact, it is Christ alone who "reveals man fully to himself" (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

St. Thomas has, moreover, shed the light of reason, purified and elevated by faith, on problems concerning man: on his nature as created to the image and likeness of God, on his personality as worthy of respect from the first moment of his conception, on his supernatural destiny as found in the beatific vision of God, One and Three. On this point we are indebted to St. Thomas for a precise and ever valid definition of that which constitutes man's essential greatness: "he has charge of himself" (*ipse est sibi providens*; cf. *Contra Gentiles*, III, 81).

Man is master of himself, he can make provision for himself and form projects towards fulfilling his destiny. This fact, however, taken by itself, does not settle the question of man's greatness, nor does it guarantee that he will be able, by himself, to reach the full perfection of personality. The only decisive factor here is that man should let himself be guided, in his actions, by the *truth*; and truth is not made by man; he can only discover it in the nature that is given to him along with existence. It is God who, as creator, calls reality into being and, as revealer, shows it forth ever more fully in Jesus Christ and in his Church. The Second Vatican Council, when it speaks of this self-providence of man "in so far as it involves knowing what is true" (*sub ratione veri*) as a "kingly ministry" (*mutius regale*), goes to the heart of this intuition.

This is the teaching which I set out to call to mind and bring up

to date in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, by drawing attention to man as "the primary and fundamental way for the Church" (n. 14).

9. I must add one last word at the end of these reflections which, of necessity, have to be brief. It concerns the thought with which Leo XIII ends his *Aeterni Patris*, "Let us follow the example of the Angelic Doctor," (*Leonis XIII, Acta*, loc. cit., p. 283) is what he advises. That is what I also repeat this evening. This advice is indeed fully justified by the witness which he gave by his manner of living and which gave force to what he said as a teacher. He had indeed the technical mastery befitting a teacher, but, prior to this, his manner of teaching was that of a saint who lives the Gospel fully, of one for whom love is everything: love of God, the primal source of all truth; love of one's neighbour, God's masterpiece; love of all created things, for these also are precious caskets full of the treasures which God has poured into them.

If we look for the driving force behind his commitment to a life of study, the secret urge which led him to consecrate himself through a total dedication, we find it in his own words: "All things issue from charity as from a principle, and all things are ordered towards charity as to an end" (*A caritate omnia procedunt sicut a principio et in caritatem omnia ordinantur sicut in finem: In John, XV, 2*). And in fact the huge intellectual effort of this master of thought was stimulated, sustained and given direction by a heart full of the love of God and of his neighbour. "The knowledge of what is true is given by the fervour of love" (*Per ardorem caritatis datur cognitio veritatis*; *ibid.*, V, 6). These words could be taken as his motto. They allow us to perceive, behind the thinker able to rise to the loftiest heights of speculation, the mystic accustomed to go straight to the very fountain of all truth to find the answer to the deepest questionings of the human spirit. Did not he himself tell us that he never wrote anything nor gave class unless he had first had recourse to prayer?

One who approaches St. Thomas cannot set aside this witness which comes from his life; he must rather follow courageously the path traced out by him and bind himself to follow his example if he would wish to taste the most secret and savoury fruits of his teaching. This is the burden of the prayer which the Liturgy places on our lips on his feast day: "O God, since it was by your gift that St. Thomas became so great a saint and theologian, give us the grace to understand his teaching and follow his way of life."

This is also what we ask from the Lord this evening, as we entrust our prayer to the intercession of "Master Thomas" himself, a master who was deeply human because he was deeply Christian, and precisely because he was so deeply Christian was so deeply human.

[1] (Translator's note). No literal English rendering could convey the meaning which this technical Latin expression - or its equivalent **esse ut actus** - had for St. Thomas, and presumably retains for Pope John Paul. It does not refer to the mere fact of existing, of "being there," especially if this is taken in a spatial or temporal sense. The meaning of the Latin **esse** is not properly expressed by the infinitive "to be", for this may refer only to the function of the copula in a proposition. Nor is the abstract term "existence" adequate, for we are dealing with the most concrete of all realities. "Actual existing", or "actual being", come closer to the meaning intended; but to avoid the connotation either of "existence" or of "being" which can be taken in a substantive sense, it might be advisable to coin the active and concrete word "*is-ing*". What St. Thomas has in mind is the most actual of all actualities, the most perfect of all perfections, the inmost principle and source of all the actuality, perfection, reality, and indeed also of the knowability, of anything that is. It is **esse** in this metaphysical sense which makes anything be, and be real; it is the immediate source of the reality and perfection of all things. This may help the reader to appreciate the Pope's insistence on this insight, so central in the thought of St. Thomas, and the implications which he draws from it in nn. 6 and 7 of his discourse.

CHRISTIAN

PHILOSOPHY

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The book — “*Christian Philosophy*” - authored by Fr. Joseph M. de Torre, Ph.D., is an answer to the confusion obtaining in our intellectual world today.

We are fed with a babel of conflicting schools of thought on philosophy which precedes the study of theology. These distortions render the untrained mind unable to delve into the intricacies of the science of God.

This 'opus' is a silver lining which will render our scholars more prepared and more solid in studying the ultimate science, which should obtain priority in the intellectual world.

I have the kindest words for this book, for the author who gave the best in him to make this 'opus' a reality.

Congratulations to our Father Joseph de Torre.

Manila, July 26, 1980.


JAIME CARDINAL L. SIN
Archbishop of Manila

"Our time calls in the first place for deep philosophical and theological convictions. Many failures in faith and in consecrated life, past and recent, and many present situations of distress and perplexity, have their origin in a crisis of a philosophical nature. It is necessary to dedicate serious efforts to one's own cultural formation. The II Vatican Council stressed the necessity of always keeping St. Thomas Aquinas as both teacher and doctor, because it is only in the light and on the basis of 'perennial philosophy' that the edifice of Christian doctrine, both logical and demanding, can be founded. Leo XIII, of venerated memory, in his famous Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which still is relevant today, the centenary of which falls this year, stressed and illustrated in an admirable way the validity of the rational foundation for Christian faith."

Pope John Paul II, Address 28 October 1979 (L'Osservatore Romano, English Ed. 3-XII-79)

"Today it is more necessary than ever, in the first place, to sow the good grain of metaphysical truth. In fact theological confusion and moral crises generally have as their cause a philosophical crisis. It is necessary to abide firmly by good and wholesome metaphysics, which refers to the Absolute, to the one transcendent God, the creator and regulator of the universe and of man. Without the metaphysical Absolute, in fact, the "foundation" for any construction is lacking and any error can be justified.

"In the Encyclical *Humani generis* Pius XII wrote with wisdom and concern: 'Everyone knows how much the Church appreciates the value of human reason, which has the task of proving with certainty the existence of one personal God, of proving invincibly by means of divine signs the foundations of Christian faith itself... But this task can be carried out suitably and reliably if reason is duly cultivated... (AAS, 42 (1950), 562-63)."

Pope John Paul II Audience 24-IV-79 (L'Osservatore Romano, English Ed. 7-V-79)

"There is a great difference between Christian philosophy and human wisdom. The latter, guided solely by the light of nature, advances slowly by reasoning on sensible objects and effects, and only after long and laborious investigation is it able at length to contemplate with difficulty the invisible things of God, to discover and understand a First Cause and Author of all things. Christian philosophy, on the contrary, so quickens the human mind that without difficulty it pierces the

heavens, and, illumined with divine light, contemplates first, the eternal source of light, and in its radiance all created things."

Catechism of the Council of Trent, Part I, Art. I

"The forthcoming 1979 brings around a Centenary: that of the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. The great prophetic voice of Leo XIII aroused Christian Philosophy then from the long and deep lethargy wherein the triumphant Encyclopedia had buried it. Leo XIII redirected the minds to the great inexhaustible sources of the Middle Ages, and in the first place to St. Thomas Aquinas. We are the heirs of this great document, which would be followed by so many others, and which the Church has never disowned. Those who have tried to gather the echo of the romantic and courageous falterings of Christian thought around the middle of the 19th century can gauge the audacity of the Pope's gesture..."

From the Introduction to the July-September 1977 issue of *Seminarium*
(Journal of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, Vatican City) by His Eminence Gabriel-Marie Cardinal Garrone, Prefect of the
Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education